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A NEWSFIELD PUBLICATION
No.2 DECEMBER 1985
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MONTHLY SOFTWARE REVIEW FOR THE
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THE COMPLETE GAMES INDEX . . .
LORDS OF MIDNIGHT MAP
Part Two

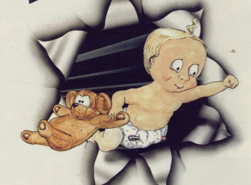


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A NEWSFIELD PUBLICATION

Cover by Oliver Frey

ISSUE 2 DECEMBER 1985

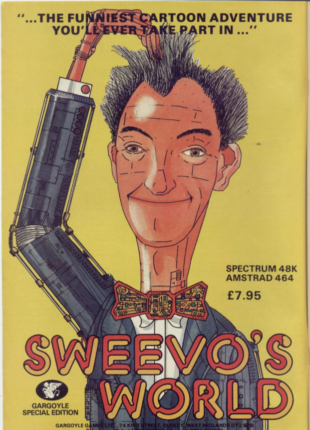
TOP PROGRAMS FOR DECEMBER

AMTIX! COMPETITIONS

DECEMBER SPECIALS

THE MAIN HEADINGS

The next issue of AMTIX! goes on sale on December 12. Getting a copy would be like having your brain replaced.


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NOW FOR THE BAD NEWS

The home computer revolution is over; the bubble has burst. You don't agree? Well, there's no reason why you should. After all if you didn't own a home computer and enjoy playing games and just using the thing, you wouldn't be reading this magazine. Try to imagine life as a non computer fan. Dull isn't it? But it's our lives that are the dull ones, judging by what the non-home-computer-fans write about us. Have you ever noticed how the national press dismisses games playing with such mindless clichés as 'Simply zapping aliens'?

I remember an article published in 'The Times' which referred to magazines like CRASH and Your Spectrum as techno pornography. Surely the only reason the author could have applied such a pointless and silly label was because he was a techno snob? He didn't understand the enjoyment which people derive from playing games, some of which are more rewarding than most of the paperback books in the bestsellers list.

And it's not just games players who are at the receiving end of mindless knocking from Fleet Street. You may remember the news item in Issue 1 which mentioned another rather silly article, again from 'The Times', slating the new Amstrad as a machine 'borrowing from the business technology of two or three years ago in a desperate attempt to rescue itself'. The author claimed that since the Amstrad offered 128k and CP/M with a built in disc drive it was a sign that the home computer industry, in order to recover lost ground, had to fall back on business-type systems. What rubbish.

The point that Amstrad are selling the system at a tenth of the price a businessman would have paid a few years ago, was lost on the author of the Times piece. He could just as easily have written his article along the lines that the technology and power available to the home computer user was rapidly catching up with that being offered by machines at the lower end of the business market. Another Times Techno Snob, whose argument presumably goes .... 'Because you can play games on an Amstrad it's not a 'proper' computer, ergo, you really can't use it for business.' (It simply isn't the done thing to use games computers in the office, you see.)

BURSTING A NEW BUBBLE?

Not content with denigrating the home computer user, elements of the press also level attacks on the home computer industry's most illustrious members. Remember Sir Clive Sinclair in his heyday? In the eyes of Fleet Street he was the Golden Boy: he could do no wrong. Sir Clive was typical of the men who would lead Britain into the next industrial revolution. We needed more men like him, went the argument.

Now look at him. Sir Clive has fallen from grace — the Golden Boy title has been withdrawn to be applied to another 'Victim' and it's all knocking copy on the 'electric clog'. Yet Sir Clive is still the same man. He may not have the sales power he once commanded but he is still a man of vision. A man who can turn dreams into technological reality. Admittedly, not everything Sir Clive touches turns to gold. The C5 was innovative but shortsighted. Nobody's perfect. But maybe, if the C5 had been an American product, the American press would have encouraged the inventor to try again, and do better. Not Fleet Street: they cut the inventor down and ridicule the product.

Britain's future still depends on men like Chris Curry and Sir Clive. But such men are as nothing without the faith of a nation and inspiring that faith lies partly within the control of Fleet Street. Without faith, innovation will not attract investment. All of us in the home computer industry share the faith. We must convince the little minds that we have our hands on the future. We must shout louder than the cynics and the critics. As yet we are a small band of enthusiasts. Despite the 'wisdom' of Fleet Street, we are still a growing band — the bubble's healthy, in good hands, and far from bursting. When there are enough of us, men like Sir Clive will flourish without being cut down by prejudiced minds. And then maybe, just maybe, the Newspaper Publishing bubble will burst. . . .

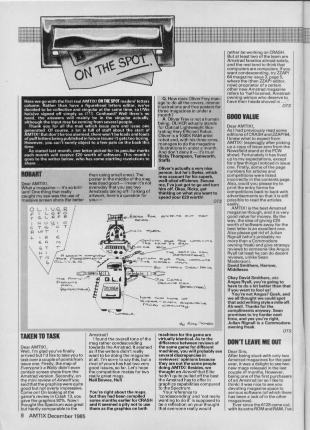
ADVERTISERS' INDEX

SOFTWARE REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

THE COMPLETE GAMES GUIDE

Mini reviews of the following games are to be found in this issue

MORE NEXT MONTH. . . .



Here we go with the first real AMTIX! **ON THE SPOT** readers' letters column. Rather than have a figurehead letters editor, we've decided to be collective and singular at the same time, so I/We ha(s)ve signed off simply as *OTS*. Confused? Well there's no need, the answers will mainly be in the singular actually, although the input may be coming from several people.

Thank you for all the mail which issue zero and issue one generated. Of course, a lot is full of stuff about the start of AMTIX! But don't be too alarmed, there won't be loads and loads of puff letters being published in future issues! It gets too boring. However, you can't surely object to a few pats on the back this time.

As stated last month, one letter picked for its peculiar merits each month will receive £20 worth of software. This month's goes to the writer below, who has some startling revelations to share . . .

ROBART

Dear AMTIX!,
What a magazine — it's so brilliant! One thing that really caught my eye was the use of massive screen shots (far better than using small ones). The poster in the middle of the mag was dead good — I mean it's not everyday that you see two Amstrads taking off! Talking of artwork, here's a question for you:—

Q. How does Oliver Frey manage to do all the covers, interior illustrations and free posters for three magazines in under a month?

A. Oliver Frey is not a human being. OLIVER actually stands for Optical Lightweight Illustrating Very Efficient Robot. Oliver is a 1000K RAM artist robot and, with his three arms, manages to do the magazine illustrations in under a month. And don't deny it — it's true!
Ricky Thompson, Tamworth, Staffs

Oliver's actually a very nice person, but he's Swiss, which may account for his superb, well-oiled efficiency. Excuse me, I've just got to go and turn him off. Okay, Ricky, get thinking on what you want to spend your £20 worth!

OTS

TAKEN TO TASK

Dear AMTIX!,
Well, I'm glad you've finally arrived but I'd like to take you to task over a couple of points from issue one. Firstly, the map of *Everyone's a Wally* didn't even contain screen shots from the Amstrad version. Secondly, on the mini review of *Airwolf* you said that the graphics were quite good but not overly impressive. Come on! On looking at the game's review in Crash 13, you gave the graphics 92%. Now I thought the Spectrum was great but hardly comparable to the Amstrad!

I found the overall tone of the mag rather condescending towards the Amstrad. It seemed as if the writers didn't really want to be doing the magazine at all. I'm sorry to say this, but a rival of yours has had two very good issues, so far. Let's hope the competition makes for two really great mags.
Neil Bowes, Hull

You're right about the maps, but they had been compiled some months earlier for CRASH and it seemed a pity not to use them as the graphics on both machines for the game are virtually identical. As to the difference between reviews of the same game for different machines, you will probably see several discrepancies in reviewers' opinions because they are not the same people doing AMTIX! Besides, we thought on *Airwolf* that Elite hadn't quite pulled off the best the Amstrad has to offer in graphics capabilities compared to the Spectrum.

Your reference to 'condescending' and 'not really wanting to do it' is supposed to be a reflection on your thought that everyone really would rather be working on CRASH. But at least two of the team are Amstrad fanatics almost solely, and the rest tend to think that computers are computers. If you want condescending, try ZZAP! 64 magazine issue 3, page 5, where the (then ZZAP! editor, now) proprietor of a certain other new Amstrad magazine refers to 'half-brained, Amstrad-owning wimps who deserve to have their heads shoved in . . .'

OTS

GOOD VALUE

Dear AMTIX!,
As I had previously read some editions of CRASH and ZZAP!64, I knew what to expect from AMTIX! (especially after picking up a copy of issue zero from the Newsfield stand at the PCW show). Fortunately it has lived up to my expectations, except for a few things I noticed in issue one. Firstly, some of the page numbers for articles and competitions were listed incorrectly in the contents page. Also, could you please try to print the entry forms for competitions back to back with advertisements so that it is still possible to read the articles easily.

AMTIX! is the best Amstrad magazine though, and it is very good value for money. By the way, the idea of giving £20 worth of software away for the best letter is an excellent one. Also please get rid of Julian Rignall (who's probably no more than a Commodore owning freak) and give strategy reviews to someone like Angus Ryall (at least he can do decent reviews, unlike Sean Masterson).
David Smithers, Harrow, Middlesex

Okay David Smithers, *aka* Angus Ryall, you're going to have to do a lot better than that if you want to fool us!

You're not Angus? Gosh, and we all thought we could spot that acid writing style a mile off. Ah well. Thanks for the compliments anyway. Sean promises to try harder next time, and yes you're right, Julian Rignall is a Commodore-owning freak.

OTS

DON'T LEAVE ME OUT

Dear Sirs,
After being stuck with only two Amstrad magazines for the past year, it was a delight to see two new mags released in the last couple of months. However, being one of the first purchasers of an Amstrad (or so I like to think) it was nice to see you devoting magazine space to serious software (of which there has been a lack of in the other magazines).

Ever since the 6128 came out, with its extra ROM and RAM, I've



been worried about being left behind, having a 464. Being unemployed, it nearly crippled me to get that — so a 6128 is out of the question. That's why I was glad to see a memory expansion pack featured in your news column. Let's hope there will be an in depth feature coming up soon. I don't suppose you know if any firm is releasing the extra ROM for the 664 and 6128 on a ROM board for the 464?
Michael Toone, Derby

OTS

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Dear AMTIX!,
I have just read carefully, and with great fascination, the first issue of AMTIX! Subsequently, I have this to say. Over the last month or two, an egotistical magazine called Amstrad Action has managed to really bring down the owners of Amstrad computers and has left myself (and several others) craving for some decent literature to back up our machine. My wishes have come true in the form of AMTIX! and I am therefore telling you, as a down to earth and informative magazine, to keep our heads up high.

From what I have seen so far, your journal has all the makings of a really successful magazine. There was plenty of eye-catching artwork to be seen; a mass of well written articles on all aspects of software and hardware; (at last) some superb regular items such as adventure 'grottos,' tips pages and excellent games reviews. It was a joy to read so many adequately detailed and lively opinions, backed up brilliantly with stacks of colour screen shots. In fact, AMTIX! has practically everything that enjoyable reading matter requires. However, there's always room for improvement and here are a couple of suggestions to help an already brilliant publication.

A couple of pages could be devoted to a suggestion forum for the readers. A swapping service page for readers' hardware and software might be useful. A high score table for readers would be a good idea. And a list of top arcade and adventure games on the market is really essential. Perhaps a monthly article on software houses and their programmers would be a good idea, allowing an explanation of the business.

For goodness sake, keep up the good work. I am looking forward to the next issue.
Robert Fox, Bromley, Kent

Thank you for all these blush-making compliments, Robert. Most of your suggestions are under some sort of consideration for inclusion soon, but to be honest, the pre-Christmas period is such a busy one that it's all we can do to keep up with things as they are! So in the New Year I think you'll see several additions along these lines.

OTS

GAMES SUPPLEMENT?

Dear AMTIX!
At last! A decent magazine for the Amstrad — you don't know how welcome you are. I have been enjoying CRASH ever since issue one and still subscribe, even without a Spectrum. I hope that I will enjoy AMTIX! for at least as long, if not longer!

The games index was useful but a bit awkward, being split up they way it was and it disrupted the reviews. Perhaps it would be better if it were supplied as a supplement every other issue. Then, when it becomes too big for the magazine (which is inevitable), give it away free with binders.

As for the parachute jump, just do it. I jumped out of an aeroplane for the first time, not very long ago. It only took a couple doctors 24 hours to put me back together again. Anyway, keep up the good work and you will as successful and as long lasting as CRASH.
Andrew Johnson, Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan

The Games Index was only intended as a fast-ish round-up of programs to date. As an honorary CRASHite, you may remember that there was a large guide section in the first few issues of that publication, and indeed it got far too big, but maintaining it also became grossly expensive, as would the same thing with AMTIX!

Fancy another parachute jump?

OTS

HIT THE SPOT

Dear Sirs,
First, a quick word of congratulation. I am a relative newcomer to the Amstrad (having owned various other computers in the past) and so have dipped into all the Amstrad magazines that I can find and yours would appear to be the closest to the 'ideal' magazine around. Lots of lovely technical reviews (although a bit more on the hardware would be appreciated). I am impressed. Suggestions for the future — how about a flops chart for the worst titles ever released? That should ruffle a few feathers. Also could you ask Sean how to pay the guide in*Souls of Darkon*?

Having got that out of the way, I have to say that this letter's purpose is to put you and all the software houses 'on the spot.' You mentioned in issue one's *Transmat* review that the fast load technique was an attempt to reduce the effects of piracy. The idea that tape protection of this sort would even reduce piracy by so much as one percent, is surely naive.

Please don't get the wrong idea. I am an ex-pirate, who now condemns the activity in whatever form it takes. However, applying protection to a tape program in the hope that it will prevent piracy is like leaving your car unlocked in London, hoping that a 'Keep off' notice will stop it being stolen! Any pirate worth his salt uses tape to tape recording. It's quick, easy and, as anyone in the record industry will tell you, is unstoppable. All 'protection' does is inconvenience the customer and the sooner the software houses recognise this, the better. With disks, it is a slightly different matter. But even with disk software, I wonder if the loss of goodwill is worth it. And even disk protection techniques can usually be overcome with relative ease.

Now I will really set the cat among the pigeons. Bearing the above in mind, I believe that whilst software houses insist on protecting their products, you should still provide a 'Crackers Corner' where routines for breaking into programs could be published. I look forward to hearing your comments and, should you publish this, I apologise to all those divs living in their Ivory Towers — er sorry, those wonderful software MD's.

Go on, publish this. It could be fun.
Chris Bone, London

Our problem with code cracking is that we are aiding and abetting pirates if we're not careful, and sometimes it can be seen as infringing copyright. Breaking into programs is slightly different — many software houses have welcomed the added attention their programs receive from the public when POKEs can be added to alter the way a game plays. I also heard an unusual point of view from one well respected programmer recently, who, whilst in conversation about another software house's extraordinary protection attempts, said, 'I don't know why they bother to try and stop people looking at their code. I'm not ashamed of the way mine is structured!'

That idea sort of turns protection into something like frosted glass on a bathroom window, to stop the neighbours looking in and seeing how unfit you are!

OTS

GOOD, BUT . . .

Dear On the Spot,
I am afraid this is not one of your anticipated 'congratulatory back slapping' letters. Your magazine is good, I admit. It contains everything and is well laid out. But a magazine calling itself the 'monthly software review' it must be the reviews that make it. And I'm afraid this is where you've fallen down. How can *Starion* possibly get 71% for sound? The only such effect in the game is a fire 'Beep' feeble even by Spectrum standards. Yet *Boulderdash*, which probably has the tune of any Amstrad game, only gets 51% and the comment 'unimpressive.' The same goes for graphics. How can *Sorcery* receive 91% for its incredible shaded and colourful screens when *On The Run* is given 92%? You should compare your reviews before publishing. these are really pretty silly judgements.

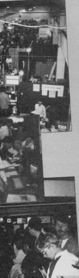
Having said that, AMTIX! is still one of the best Amstrad magazines around and has many good bits. Your tips and maps are great. But why do I get the impression that AMTIX! takes second place to CRASH in your minds. Couldn't you have a different team for each mag?
W Redgrave, Maidenhead, Berks

In fact there are separate teams for each of the mags, although there is some overlap as well. I've never quite seen what this 'separatism' is supposed to do, after all what we're discussing here are computer programs. It's the ideas and presentation contained within them that count, not the machine for which they are intended (though obviously that must have some bearing). It's like comparing novels published in different formats, as though they were intrinsically different because of the format.

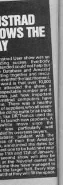
The thing is, I think we've been too honest for our own good — result, a lot of readers who have written in seem to think AMTIX! is a poor neighbour to CRASH, which isn't the case at all. I just think you see that because some of you rather expected too. Other magazines, if closely examined across the board, will be shown to be using a very small coterie of writers. Indeed, Chris Anderson of *Amstrad Action* has just been appointed head of *Commodore User*'s 'G Force' reviewing team, so there too, you have a situation where people write for mixed computers.

OTS

**If you have anything you would like to express about AMTIX!, Amstrad games software, software houses, programmers, computers, life in general (nothing about the Universe please), then write in to:
ON THE SPOT, AMTIX! PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB**


For such a young machine, Amstrads can certainly pull the crowds.

The face that launched a serial interface, the man from Honeysoft — Chris Honey.



AMSTRAD SHOWS THE WAY

The Amstrad User show was an oustanding sucess. Everbody who attended could not help but admire Database and Amstrad for getting together and rescuing the event at the last moment.

The word is that over 10,000 people attended the show, a very respectable number and it illustrates just how important the Amstrad computers have become. There was a healthy range of suppliers who all seemed to be doing quite brisk trade. Some, like DK Tronics used the show to launch new products. A worthwhile move since the show was particularly well attended by overseas buyers.

Database, jubilant with the success of their first Amstrad show, announced the dates for the next one to be held next year on the 11th and 12th of January. The second show will also be held at the Novotel centre but this time they have managed to book the larger hall. Every sign is that that they will fill the space.


Selling software is thirsty work.



The man from Davis Rubins hawking th book of Public Domain Software.

BENIGN DESIGN

Design Design (pronounced Des Des) are set to release *Forbidden Planet*, follow up to the famed *Dark Star*, sometime towards the end of this year. The main game involves a great deal of low flying over vector represented landscape and a lot of heavy blasting. A poorly timed early morning call to programmer Simon Brattel from a news minion revealed Des Des's intention to also include the previously unreleased (and unprogrammed) Amstrad conversion of Spectrum classic, *Hall of Things*. Also to be included is the latest version of the now famous *Spectacle*, a humour based Ceefax parody, spitting vitriol at a large proportion of the software industry. Satire aside though, *Forbidden Planet* is said to make 'Rupert the Bear look like . . . Rupert the Bear.'

A CONSEQUENCE OF CROSSED WIRES

Amongst the many games examined in last month's issue of Amtix, we reviewed a new game by Probe Software called *The Devil's Crown*. Frankly, it received a poor review with an overall rating of 52%. Of course, we gain nothing by being biassed in our reviews and Probe know this as well as any other software house. They were still incensed by some of the comments and conclusions, however. Apparently, we reviewed an unfinished copy, believing that we had the finished product in our hands.

This led to us criticising the lack of loading and title screens, no high score table and the disturbing fact that pressing Escape would crash the game. In an effort to set the matter straight, Probe kindly sent us another (finished) copy as soon as possible. Sure enough, this one was properly protected, and had all the features mentioned above. Consequently, our Presentation rating of 39% is evidently unfair and we would like to make it known that this has been increased to 76%.

However, we were also told by Probe that the flickery sprites our first version had suffered from, were now smoothed out. With the second copy, this did not prove to be the case. The only aesthetic improvement we came across was a slight difference in the border design which made the screen more readable. This aspect has been taken into consideration under Presentation. Finally, the entire reviewing team responsible for the original comments have seen the final version. Regrettably, with the notable exception of Presentation, they feel that the views expressed in the original review are still valid.

We thank Probe for bringing this matter to light and hope that other slip ups do not occur again. It is only by the unbiassed review of **complete** games and utilities, that Amtix can hope to establish itself as the definitive guide to all Amstrad software.

AMSTRAD DOUBLE PROFITS

Well actually, they increased by over 120% from just over £9 million last year, to over £20 million in the twelve months ending June 30th this year. Not surprisingly, Alan Sugar, chairman is understandably pleased with the progress. He said that this year, computer sales accounted for 66% of turnover as opposed to just 1% last year.

Despite some of the criticism levelled at the company and doubts as to whether they could crack the computer market, they are the only British company to have shown a profit so far this year. Without wanting to make things bitter for Mr Sugar, it might be worth remembering that the Inland Revenue (who seem to be getting a disproportionately large amount of press, this month) have yet to get their hands on some of this money.

Still, this won't bother them too much. After all, the latest news in, indicates that the PCW 8256, Amstrad's new word processing package, is selling out wherever it appears. Lightening the distributors, are on their third batch at the moment. Several branches of Dixons and Lasky's sold out within a few days of the machines arriving. All this is despite a bug, found to exist on the first five hundred machines, which causes a total system crash when using the soft hyphen! Amstrad are aware of the bug, however, and are doing their utmost to see that everybody gets a revised copy of the bug free software, as soon as possible.

FIREBIRD RISE

Elsewhere in this issue of Amtix, there are reviews of two Super Silver games from Firebird, *Chimera* and *Willow Pattern Adventure*. When we reviewed the former game, Firebird had the range priced at £3.50. However, while we were working on *Willow Pattern*, Firebird decided to re-price the range at £3.95. This has led to our reviews giving different prices — hope this clears up any confusion . . .

YOU WILL BELIEVE A COMPUTER GAME CAN FLY!

Beyond, apart from being bought out by BT, are getting quite worked up about their new *Superman — The Computer Game*, licenced from First Star. Billed as an 'action strategy' game, the plot involves the Man Of Steel battling against his evil opponent, Darkseid for control of Metropolis. Another novel feature lies in Beyond's claim that it will be simultaneously launched 'across the world.'

There should be little need for complex rules and the emphasis will be on action. Strategy sections will be broken up with 'breathtaking animated sequences,' according to the press release. Sounds interesting. All versions of the game should cost £9.95 and release is imminent.

The Amstrad crew examine the remains of their stand after the onslaught of souvenir hunters.

PAST MASTERS BLAST AGAIN

They Sold a Million sees the launch of a new hybrid label combining the talents of Ultimate, Software Projects, Ocean and US Gold. It's a compilation tape featuring some of the biggest sellers over the past year or so, packed onto two tapes with a side for each game. Being launched simultaneously on the Amstrad, Spectrum and Commodore, the package should be in the shops by the 1st of November, in time for the Christmas rush. The Amstrad version includes *Sabre Wulf*, *Jet Set Willy*, *Beach Head* and *Daley Thomson's Decathlon*. Interestingly, Amstrad versions of both *Sabre Wulf* and *Jet Set Willy* are being specially created for this venture and Software Projects' original 130 screen Amstrad *Jet Set Willy* is stripped down to the standard 60 screen version. Both disc and cassette version will be available, £9.95 for cassette and £12.95 for disc.

THE POWER BEHIND BEYOND

British Telecom, 'the power behind the button' and owners of Firebird, have bought up Beyond Software, it transpired this month. Apparently, Beyond (which used to be part of the EMAP group) went for a hefty, six figure sum. Beyond's own label, Monolith will also become part of Telecom's new electronic publishing arm. Nexus, however is seen as a company which sold titles to Beyond, so its future owners have not yet been decided.

The connection with First Star, in the States is something that contributed largely to BT's interest in Beyond, as they see a transatlantic approach to be a feature of software development. The new acquisition will not be merged with Firebird, BT's existing software label.

Despite appearances to the contrary, Barry McGuigan isn't really trying to persuade Activision UK's MD, Hugh Rees-Parnall to hurry-up and bring out *Barry McGuigan World Championship Boxing* for the Amstrad. Fear not, however. Activision have a plan to supply us with the game very soon. It's enjoying incredible success on the Commodore, so it's arrival on our favourite machine should be something to look forward to. Then we can all have a go at him!

MAGIK CHRISTMAS?

After being delayed for over twelve months, there is a chance that PSS's *Swords and Sorcery*, a computer game in the *Dungeons and Dragons* mold, could be released before the end of the year. PSS felt that the project was too ambitious initially. Now PSS are saying it will be 'the next *Hobbit*.' November is being mentioned as an approximate release date. This could mean a clash with Melbourne House's *Lord of the Rings*. The first version to be released will be for the Spectrum. An Amstrad version is planned to arrive later. The game will cost £9.95.

. . . AND THINKING MEN'S GAMES

Oxford Computer Publishing are joining Micronet, the database announced recently. It is all part of Micronet's eagerness to be seen encouraging Telesoftware. 'We are really pleased to be associated with a company as prestigious as OCP,' said Phil Godsell, Micronet's Software Manager. 'They produce excellent, high quality utilities and business packages like *VAT Manager*, as well as what I like to call, Thinking Men's Games like *Casino Royal* and *Chess The Turk*.'

EVERYONE LOVES A CLUB

Amsoft have announced the Amstrad User Club and are promising lots of members only offers to those willing to part with their money and show their loyalty. For a cheap £155.90, you receive a year's subscription to the official Amstrad magazine, a DDI-1 disk drive (for 464's only), a copy of *Roland in Space* on disk and a free, blank CF-2 disk. Details are available from Amsoft.

OUT OF MEMORY

Ever get those 'Oh no. I've lost all my memory and I don't know who I am,' blues? Well, *Mindshadow* from Activision is an adventure you can probably identify with. The plot starts with you waking up on a deserted beach, without a clue as to where you have come from. Anxious to learn more about your past history, you must take up a quest for identity that leads halfway around the world, ultimately ending with a re-affirmed identity for you, and a hard time for the faceless stranger who abandoned you on the beach. Throughout the game, help is available via the mystical Condor, a wise old bird who knows a few things to make unravelling your dilemma a little easier.

Already a big hit on the Commodore 64, *Mindshadow* is a multi-load game on cassette. The game is split into four separate sections, each requiring a separate load from tape. Available some time early November, it will set you back a mere £9.99.

BORED OF THE RINGS?

After acquiring something of a cult status on the Spectrum, Delta 4's *Bored of the Rings* is set to appear on the Amstrad. *Bored of the Rings* takes the mirth out of the Tolkien Classic, *Lord of the Rings*. Written with *The Quill* and *Illustrator*, the Spectrum version was pretty impressive. Hopefully the Amstrad version will follow in a similar vein. Probably available by the time you read this, *Bored of the Rings* is relatively cheap at £6.95 for the cassette version and £11.95 for the disk. Watch this space for a full review.

BIZZ NOW AVAILABLE ON MICRONET . . .

Micronet 800 have launched a new 500 page section called **Bizznet**. The mini-database, co-organised with Reed Employment, will deal with all kinds of professional help from taxation to mortgages and setting up your own business. Because of the agency connection, there will also be a Jobsearch section and a Watchdog feature to act for complaints against computer products.

MINER WILLY MEETS HIS MATCH?

Addicts of Matthew Smith's legendary Miner Willy of *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* fame should be pleased to hear that, in the best possible tradition of epic sagas, a third game is planned for release in January 1986. This conclusion to Software Projects' trilogy is to be called *Miner Willy Meets the Taxman*. Apparently, the Inland Revenue are after their share of Willy's good fortunes (could this really be Matthew's autobiography?), in which case the game should be a first. Nobody wins against the Inland Revenue! No price has yet been released.

ACTIVISION'S CHRISTMAS STOCKING

Currently being raved about on the Commodore 64 software scene is American software house, Lucasfilm, games division of the famed film makers themselves. Owner of Lucasfilm rights in this country, Activision, are planning to release faithful conversions of the American mega games as soon as possible. Three titles are planned in the near future, *Ballblazer*, *Koronis Rift* and *Eiderlon*.

Koronis Rift and *Eiderlon* make extensive use of amazing Fractal plotting routines. Basically, this means the programmers can shift huge shapes around the screen in realistic 3D. *Ballblazer* is a future sport simulation of cunning simplicity. Release dates are a bit obscure at the moment, though it seems likely that they will be available early next year. For further developments, keep you eyes glued to this journal.

MORE WHEEEEE, SPLAT (GENTLY)

An update on how the CRASH/ZZAP!/AMTIX! Dr Barnardo and Action Group charity parachute jump is going, as the clock ticks away the seconds to takeoff time for some hapless Newsfield Nutters. . . .

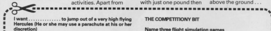
Now that the votes are beginning to come in there is an air of panic circulating through the Towers. At the top of the jump league table is our very own lovable (almost), affable (rarely) and helpful (never), Denise the Subscription Queen. This unenviable position is due to one man, who shall remain nameless though readers of CTW may know to whom we refer. As an **Incentive** to the rest of you the anonymous donor has promised to keep sending in the loot to keep Denise at the top of the list. That could cost him a lot of money. Denise is trying to establish exactly what it is that he wants to make him renege on his promise.

Another high flyer is ZZAP's very own mini hero Julian Rignall. So far the voters have placed him firmly on the tarmac, if not actually in the aircraft itself. A couple of readers offered extra loot if Rignall would make the jump without the aid of a chute — he's giving the idea some thought.

In the meantime the software industry is beginning to put up goodies for the voters to win — we'll publish a list of the prizes on offer in future issues.

Dr. Barnardo's, who have a reputation as the world's largest family, are jubilant about being on the receiving end of your generosity. Since the 1870 the organisation has been helping and caring for children who have either been orphaned or who are disadvantaged in other ways. Nowadays Barnardo's are involved in a wide range of activities. Apart from running childrens' homes Barnardo's provide help and advice for the parents of handicapped children as well as day care centres, fostering and adoption services and education for children who need help to overcome a wide range of problems. Barnardo's pointed out that they are also heavily reliant on the use of electronic aids in their projects. The more common applications for computers are as communication aids, alarm systems and in computerised wheel chairs. Not surprisingly, some of Dr Barnardo's children are computer games addicts as well.

Last year Dr Barnardo's helped over 9,000 children. With your help they could help even more next year. If all of our readers responded with just one pound then Barnardo's and the Action group could benefit by £100,000. Don't be mean — send in your loot! Besides the invaluable help that you will be giving the two charities, don't forget you stand a good chance of winning one of the many prizes on offer. And you could have the satisfaction of knowing that you've put one of the Newsfield Nutters in a very awkward position — 2000 feet above the ground . . .



I want . . . . to jump out of a very high flying Hercules (He or she may use a parachute at his or her discretion)

I enclose a donation of £ . . . . (minimum of £1.00) and no coins, please. We get charged for receiving them.

I am frequently known as . . . .

and can be reached at . . . .

. . . .

. . . .

SEND YOUR VOTES AND LOOT (NO COINS!) to:

WEEeeeee SPLAT! PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE, SY8 1DB

THE COMPETITIONY BIT

Name three flight simulation games

(1) . . . .

(2) . . . .

(3) . . . .

In fifteen words or less, using your skill, judgement and a pen complete the phrase below in the most apt and original way . . . .

I WANT SEAN MASTERSON TO JUMP BECAUSE

. . . .

STOP PRESS! Oli offers original cover painting as a prize for the voters in the Loony Leap Charity Competition!

PALACE SOFTWARE PROUDLY PRESENTS

CAULDRON



Explore an entire world in 'Cauldron' – A spectacular arcade adventure featuring shoot-'em-up and platform jumping.

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Please send me ________ cassette(s) of Cauldron (Amstrad) @£8.99

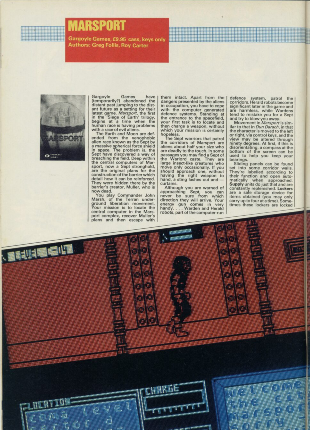
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MARSPORT

Gargoyle Games, £9.95 cass, keys only
Authors: Greg Follis, Roy Carter

Gargoyle Games have (temporarily?) abandoned the distant past jumping to the distant future as a setting for their latest game. *Marsport*, the first in the 'Siege of Earth' trilogy, begins at a time when the human race is having problems with a race of evil aliens.

The Earth and Moon are defended from the xenophobic alien race known as the Sept by a massive spherical force shield in space. The problem is, the Sept have discovered a way of breaching the field. Deep within the central computers of Marsport, now a Sept stronghold, are the original plans for the construction of the barrier which detail how it can be reinforced. They were hidden there by the barrier's creator, Muller, who is now dead.

You play Commander John Marsh, of the Terran underground liberation movement. Your mission is to locate the central computer in the Marsport complex, recover Muller's plans and then escape with them intact. Apart from the dangers presented by the aliens in occupation, you have to cope with the computer generated defence systems. Standing at the entrance to the spacefield, your first task is to locate and then charge a weapon, without which your mission is certainly hopeless.

The Sept warriors that patrol the corridors of Marsport are aliens about half your size who are deadly to the touch. In some passages you may find a Sept of the Warlord caste. They are large insect-like creatures who move only occasionally. If you should approach one, without having the right weapon to hand, a sting lashes out and — curtains.

Although you are warned of approaching Sept, you can never be sure from which direction they will arrive. Your energy gun comes in very handy. . . . Warden and Herald robots, part of the computer-run defence system, patrol the corridors. Herald robots become significant later in the game and are harmless, while Wardens tend to mistake you for a Sept and try to blow you away.

Movement in *Marsport* is similar to that in *Dun Darach*, in that the character is moved to the left or right, via control keys, and the view may be altered through ninety degrees. At first, if this is disorientating, a compass at the bottom of the screen can be used to help you keep your bearings.

Sliding panels can be found set into some corridor walls. They're labelled according to their function and open automatically when approached. **Supply** units do just that and are constantly replenished. **Lockers** are a safe storage device for items obtained (you may only carry up to four at a time). Sometimes these lockers are locked

and you have to put a certain object in the **Key** unit nearby in order to open the covering plate. **Refuse** units allow you to get rid of objects you no longer want — useful given that you can't drop anything, and remember, you can always throw away unpleasant things. **Power** units provide power for objects that need it, such as your weapon, and finally **Factor** units manufacture a new object from other objects placed inside them. Factor units are essential — some of the things you need to complete your mission do not even exist until you create them!

Rooms in the complex are identified by a nameplate above the door. 'Danger' above a room, not surprisingly, means that there is something to be wary of inside, while 'Restricted' rooms cannot be entered until you have located the central computer. Consequently, once the first part of the game has been completed, a lot more of the playing area opens up. Many rooms need a specific key to open them . . . so a little careful thought is needed.

The main action takes place in the top half of the screen, whilst the bottom half gives compass directions, details of objects carried, weapon status and messages. Messages are received when you pass a Vidtex unit or when you are in the process of constructing another object. The bottom half of the screen also gives details of the area you are in.

The playing area in *Marsport* is estimated at being twice the size *Dun Darach*. Not a little game! Unlike Gargoyle's previous two games, *Marsport* is not played on a flat plain. Instead, it is constructed like a 3D tower block. Each floor has a different function — for instance the Recreational area has a couple of little games that can be played. The levels are connected via a series of lifts that may or may not be one or two directional.

Marsport features realistic 3D effects: John Marsh can stroll in front of and behind struts, and a lot of attention has been paid to the animation of his movements.

Unless you have a few weeks to spare, the game will need to be played in several sessions. Thoughtfully, Gargoyle have provided a save game routine — which can also be used just before you do something especially tricky in case things don't work out.

And once you do get the plans, the game isn't over — you still have to escape from Marsport. Not a trivial task, but this time, Gargoyle have added quite an interesting feature to the end of the game . . .

Control keys: Walk left/right (ALTERNATE KEYS ON BOTTOM ROW); Enter a door (RETURN); Camera left/right (ALTERNATE KEYS ON SECOND ROW); Pick up/drop (ALTERNATE KEYS ON THIRD ROW); Select object (ANY TOP ROW); Fire (SPACE BAR); Auto-run on/off (4) on the numeric pad; Freeze/unfreeze (5) on the numeric pad; Options (6) on the numeric pad.

CRITICISM

1 **With *Marsport* Gargoyle Games have brought new meaning to the word arcade adventure. *Dun Darach* was hailed as being the serious arcade adventure on the Amstrad. Gargoyle's latest game has taken that already successful formula and improved it by far. The graphics are very good though they tend to be a bit slow and at times slightly jerky but the red background walls add a lot of atmosphere. The problems are devious and it could take many months before you finish the game. Definitely a very good game that is worth all of the £9.95 asking price especially if you consider that there are a lot of abysmal games being sold at the same price.**

2 I've not always been a fan of tough games like this one but *Marsport* has won my admiration. The presentation is very good even though the game can't be played with a joystick. Once the all-essential gun has been found it really warms up, becomes fun and can prove terribly addictive. The graphics are very good especially those of the Sept Warlords but it is a bit of a shame about the sound. If you're not into arcade/adventures then I doubt you will like this game but there are a lot of problems to solve so if you do like it you can be kept playing for an eternity.

3 *The sense of humour that bubbles just below the surface of Gargoyle's mammoth arcade†adventures is particularly evident in this new game which takes their form of 3D exploration further than ever before. There must be some people about who dislike this type of game, but I'm sure the majority will love it. Addition of a weapon makes for some arcade action fun to the earlier format, and the puzzles should keep you guessing for some time, although a 'groan-ometer' is essential for some of the puns used as answers! The graphics are of a generally high standard, with some super animation. I can't wait for part two of this new trilogy, which I've heard will be treated in a graphically different way. It's exciting to think about what Gargoyle will come up with. . . .*

Presentation 85%
Very good packaging with a nice strong back up story.

Graphics 92%
Beautiful characters though movement does prove a little slow.

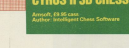
Sound 9%
Very limited indeed but the game does have a strong atmosphere.

Playability 87%
Abit difficult until you have found the gun.

Addictive Qualities 93%
Plenty to keep you going for a long, long time.

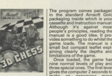
Value for Money 95%
Abit above the average Amstrad game price but worth it.

Overall 94%
If you're into arcade adventures then this is the one to get.



CYRUS II 3D CHESS

Amsoft, £9.95 cass
Author: Intelligent Chess Software



The program comes packaged in the standard Amsoft Gold packaging inside which is your cassette and instruction manual. Although it's against most people's principles, reading the manual is a good idea. It provides something to do whilst the game loads. The manual is a small but compact leaflet explaining clearly the depths and limitations of the game.

Once loaded, the game has nine normal levels of play and three special ones. The first level gives the computer 2 seconds to make an answering move whereas level 9 allows 2 minutes 30 seconds. Pressing the **M** key interrupts the computer and forces it to make the best move calculated at that point. One of the special levels provides a better method. It is called the **adaptable** method and calculates how long you spend deciding a move and then spends the same amount of time itself.

The other special levels are **infinite** and **problem**. On the infinite level, *Cyrus* only theorises until you tell it to stop and make a move (there are exceptions to this such as when only one legal move exists for the computer). On the problem level, the computer looks for a way to force checkmate in five moves or less.

The program supplies all the usual features such as analysis, retraction and replay of moves, hints and a demonstration mode. But apart from the usual option to save the game to either disk or tape, there is also a useful printer option. A serious chess player would be able to keep track of his progress without having to constantly load old games.

There are two optional displays. One is the traditional algebraic notation and provides the standard plan view display. The other is the 3D aspect board, made so much of in the title. A small arrow is displayed on your move and you allocate the piece and new position with it. At the bottom of the screen is the chess clock so you can see your response time.

Control keys: cursor keys.

CRITICISM

1 **To be honest, I'm not usually bothered about chess programs because basically, I'm not very good at the game. This one does appeal to me though. The 3D makes the actual game look attractive to play. And there's no problem setting up special levels or moves — it's all very well done. I can't honestly tell how much of a challenge it would provide for a good player as I can't even beat it on the first level. If you have the slightest interest in chess, then get this. You could well end up an addict.**

PLAYER 0:01:21 CYRUS 0:00:16

2 The game is very well presented and plays well. There is no doubt, in my mind that this is a powerful game. After a while I think a competent player would be winning most games on the first level. But I played the game on level 9 once, and the result was laughable. It took very little effort from the computer before even I could see doom approaching. Not a game to play again-st if you have an ego. Some of the 3D doesn't work too well but it's still of a pretty high standard overall. The animation is smooth and that goes to make this the best presented chess program on the Amstrad. The options available should suit players from total beginners to competent club level. An excellent game.

3 *Although presentation was excellent in the 3D game, I thought it could have been better on areas like the options screen. This wasn't particularly bad in any way but it wasn't presented with any of the sophistication found in other*

PLAYE



parts of the program. More importantly however, the game itself was very good. It has all the options you really need without being clogged and unplayable as a result. The package is neat, uncomplicated and highly playable. The best I've seen to date.

Presentation 87%
Good all round, but perhaps not outstanding when selecting options.

Graphics 88%
The blue-white chess board and pieces work excellently on the 3D game.

Sound 5%
There is only an error buzz but the game requires no other sound anyway so this isn't a criticism.

Playability 90%
No problems are likely to be encountered.

Addictive qualities 85%
Really depends on how much you like chess but the program will draw you back if you get into the game.

Value for money 89%
There are more expensive and less efficient chess games on the market.

Overall 90%
Well programmed and marvellously presented chess game.

AN AMTIX! ACCOLADE

3D GRAND PRIX

Amsoft, £9.95 cass, £13.95 disk
Author: Mick O'Neill and Dave Mendes

Another release by the ambitious Amsoft Gold department involves taking the role of a formula one racing driver. Such games have been made famous in the past by the likes of Atarisoft's *Pole Position* but this is one straight from the Amsoft fold.

As is the norm with racing games, you are offered a choice of circuits to compete on. In this game there are eight to choose from; Zandvoort, Silverstone, Anderstorp, Jarama, Roeur, Brands Hatch, Kyahami and Mosport. You have to successfully drive your car around all the courses. Being successful counts as finishing the race between first and third after three laps. You then qualify to race on the next circuit.

When sat in the driving seat, you have two wing mirror views and a gear selector display, apart from the obligatory forward view. Gear selection is important as the car's performance suffers if it's not in the right gear for the speed. Wing mirrors are useful to find out just who's behind you — overtaking drivers have no manners in this game! They cut in front of you whenever they can.

Unlike some other race games, this one does not kill you off when you crash. You simply come to a very sudden halt and several other cars overtake you before you get back on the circuit again. Other features of the game include a scrolling backdrop, warning signs and a plethora of sound effects.

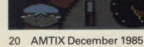
Control keys: Z (LEFT); X (RIGHT); 'PLUS' (ACCELERATE); ? (BRAKE); SPACE (CHANGE GEAR).

CRITICISM

1 **There certainly are some good effects in this game. The courses are hard, and there are plenty of them. The sound effects are really good through the stereo adaptor. After that, there's not a lot to recommend it. The wing mirror is a good idea but badly done; you can turn an extreme corner but the mirror doesn't notice. The way you get slammed to a halt for hitting another car is silly. The other car still shoots off into the distance. The graphics are pretty good (front tyres are very effective). Some of the backgrounds are really sharp but do all of those race courses actually have the same pavilion? Whether they have or not isn't really important as you'll soon find yourself, wind in your hair, gritting your teeth, trying to finish a pretty compelling game.**

2 First impressions led me to believe this would be a remarkable game. Playing it for a while modified my opinion slightly. The other cars on the track have a tendency to behave unrealistically at times and this can become annoying. Some aspects of the car are badly drawn but you don't normally notice the details. I did think that it was very playable and most of the time the graphics are very good indeed. It isn't quite a classic but *3D Grand Prix* is still a pretty good racing game.

3 *This is a very challenging race game. The circuits are varied and well chosen. The graphics are eye catching and the sound has some interesting features. It isn't perfect, however. Gear change is sluggish and some of the other cars move jerkily. By the time you get half way through the game, this can make your work difficult. On the other hand, the pace is a suitably fast one which should test your dexterity considerably. In all, I think that the game's good points outweigh its bad ones. If you're looking for a racing game then so far this is the best of its kind on the Amstrad.*



Presentation 64%
Mediocre packaging.

Graphics 85%
Impressive in parts but there are some annoying glitches.

Sound 73%
Standard effects for a race game but well done.

Playability 84%
Instantly playable.

Addictive qualities 83%
If the few faults don't bother you too much (and they shouldn't), you'll want to get further.

Value for money 79%
Not bad for a game of this scope.

Overall 86%
Challenging race game with some graphic faults. Still the best of its kind on the Amstrad.

HACKER

Activision, £9.99 cass
Author: Steve Cartwright

Closely following on from the Commodore and Spectrum versions, Activision have made *Hacker* available to the throngs of Amsters up and down the country. Now you too, can engage in hypothetical furtive activities, late at night. For those of you who have missed out on what it's all about, here's the rundown.

Hacker comes without instructions (other than the standard loading details). There is no title screen: no options — nothing. Once you've loaded the game, you find out why — the screen turns blue and prompts 'Logon Please'. From this point on, it's up to you. The idea is, that at the end of a session accessing bulletin boards with your modem, you decide to ring one more number before going to bed. It's late, however, and you're tired. You misdial and end up in some anonymous mainframe. There are no clues as to what the password is, and it's doubtful you'd guess it first time without the most incredible piece of luck. Luck is on your side, however, for after a few failed attempts at guessing the password, the computer starts to terminate your involvement with the system. Before it disconnects the line, the mainfraim suffers a very convenient malfunction, and the system crashes. When it recovers, the computer believes you have already gained legitimate access, and you are logged on . . . .

If you enter the system by this method, there is a little intelligence test for you to pass. A schematic of a Subterranean Remote Unit (SRU) is drawn on the screen and you have to complete a systems check on it. This requires you to do little more than follow prompts and move the joystick. After a few attempts at this, you should get through to the next stage.

Here you are asked to input your name (not a trick) and set up a map. The map, in the bottom half of the screen, is a gridded world map with night time areas and certain cities displayed on it. After setting the time of day to match yours, you learn that your SRU (remember those?) is situated in the South Atlantic. A little cursor on the relevant part of the grid confirms this. 'You're on your own,' (as Phil Collins once said) from this point on. First thing you become aware of is the top half of the screen display which changes, presenting a menu of options, your 'front view' from the SRU, a compass and a message indicator.

Whilst you are exploring the underground network, finding routes to the different cities, little by little, the plot becomes more evident. You are inside a computer belonging to Magma Ltd, a company that is involved in a plot to take over the world. A document has gone missing and it must be retrieved before other interested parties come across it. This is complicated by the fact that the document is in pieces, with different sections held by unscrupulous spies, who are themselves spread out in locations across the face of the globe. You have to deal with the spies in order to collect the pieces and assemble the document, which then has to be returned to a certain location.

This is made difficult because the spies, being the untrustworthy, double-dealing bunch they are, allow you to trap yourself. A spy will happily accepting an item you need to give to another agent in order to trade. Not only that, but the long range scanner goes faulty after a while, leaving you totally blind to your location. To cap it all, Magma eventually discover your intrusion and send out security satellites which, when they find you, commence a series of progressively harder security checks. After all that, you probably don't want to hear that there's a time limit as well . .

CRITICISM

1 *Hacker* **is a superbly designed game, oozing with originality. If noth ing else, we've come to expect originality from Activision recently. The game works well. Packed with vitality and atmosphere woven into a deceptively clever plot, it provides the most stimulating graphic adventure I've ever come across. It does have its faults however. The sound effects are poor, as is the redesigned character set and there's really no excuse for this. Also, some form of randomisation in the dealing of different items would have negated the tedium which threatens to settle in after a few games. The graphics too, could have been better — as it is they make few demands on the Amstrad. In the end, I think Activision managed to do what they wanted well.** ***Hacker*** **is worth it.**

2 Okay, comparisons are odious but this version of *Hacker* isn't as good as versions for other machines in some respects. The SRU arms don't move when you obtain items from other spies for instance, and some of the sound effects are rather tame. I don't think that the game will appeal to everybody — it is a little obscure. On the other hand, it's the different style of this game that makes you love it or hate it. I love it. I think a lot of Amsters will too.

HACKER
You've found your way in.
But is there a way out?

3 *I enjoyed playing* Hacker *for the first few times. There's nothing quite like it on the Amstrad (at least as far as I know) but to be honest, it does seem to become a bit routine after a while. There's not enough variety. There's plenty to go at in the game, but the author could have included randomisation in some areas and it would have added greatly to the game. Overall, a pretty good job has been done. I admire it — but at the same time, I'm slightly disappointed that more wasn't made of this excellent idea.*

Presentation 79%
There's very little to complain about because there's very little there. It's the nature of the game.

Graphics 75%
Very good in parts but otherwise lacking to some degree.

Sound 67%
Rather tame but not too bad.

Playability 68%
Rather difficult at first.

Addictive qualities 86%
One thing you always want to do on this game is get that little bit further.

Value for money 83%
There's plenty of game to get your teeth into here.

Overall 84%
Brilliantly conceived but let down slightly by unambitious implementation.


FORBIDDEN PLANET
2112 AD
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SLAPSHOT

Anirog, £8.95 cass
Author:

Sports simulations are all the rage, and the Amstrad is not being left behind. Now Anirog have released *Slapshot*, an ice hockey simulation to add to the growing collections of sports simulations available.

Ice hockey is reputed to be one of the meanest and roughest team games in the world, which may account for its popularity on the other side of the Atlantic. The electronic version is bound to be a little gentler since there are only four men in each team, and the goalie is committed to spending his time wandering up and down the goal mouth. The player controls whichever of his men are nearest to the puck, but, since the remainder of the team are free to move about as they please you can find that the player you are controlling switches from one man to another.

As with the real-life, leg-breaking, bone-crushing version, each game consists of three, three minute periods. The game starts with three players from each team standing, poised for action, around the puck in the centre of the rink. Your first task is to get possession of the puck; next you must keep possession until you give give the puck to the opposing team, preferably in the back of their net.

Moving around the rink is very easy — just guide your man in the direction you want him to move. However, if he has the puck then he will move a lot slower than the other players which means that they can catch you up. The best way to move at speed is to keep hitting the puck in the direction you are going, and hope that you catch up with it before anyone else does.

If the other team have the puck then you must concentrate on getting it back before they reach your net. You can do this in one of three ways: by outskating an opponent who has the puck and so manoeuvering across his path, or by intercepting the puck as it is passed from one player to the next. The third method is called 'checking', a rather inoffensive word for what could more accurately be described as barging. However, even ice hockey has its limits, if you are too aggressive in your checking you can be penalised in the form of a play off awarded to the other team which is taken very near your net.

Winning the game is all down to accurate puck control, not just when moving with the puck but more importantly when shooting for goal. The puck can be passed in a number of different directions and at two speeds. To be in with a reasonable chance of getting the puck from one end of the rink to the other, you must be able to pass it accurately between your team's members.

Slap Shot can be played against the computer or against another person. Players can use either joysticks or the keyboard.

CRITICISM

1 **This is quite an enjoyable game to play although some of the graphics are a bit lacking. Moving with the puck is very straightforward but shooting takes some time to master. I was disappointed that I couldn't control the goalie. After all, the goalie is the last line of defence, and it's annoying only being able to watch the man slide from one post to another unable to place him in the path of the oncoming puck.**

2 There are a number of factors that let this game down very badly. First, the graphics are OK except when any one character is superimposed over the background or another character. Then it becomes very difficult to work out just who is doing what to whom. The movement of the men should depend on the movement of the puck — surely they should follow it? Sometimes, my men seemed to move in exactly the wrong direction, as did the men in the opposing team. There were a few times when my men couldn't decide which of them should take up the puck, and just jumped up and down in panic while the computer tried to sort it out, leaving the other team with open access to the puck. One rather clumsy trick was that when a goal is scored the computer announces it with the word 'GOL' printed under the main playing area. My last complaint was that the sound was cut off from the time a penalty was awarded until the puck was hit again leaving an awkward and lengthy period of silence.

3 *Although I enjoyed playing this game I did find that it lacked realism. I have still not managed to control the goalie, I seem to be able to make him change position before the puck is on the move but once its bearing down on the goal mouth the idiot stands still. The movement of the men is a little silly — it would have been quite OK if they could just slide, but instead they take sliding strides. At the end of a period the action simply freezes. This gave me a mild heart attack first time around, because it really looked as if the game had crashed. All in all a potentially fun game but frayed round the edges.*

Presentation 48%
Very plain box and very few options, as a whole the package and game are tatty

Graphics 70%
Generally good but some irritating points.

Sound 45%
Would have been much better if it wasn't for the bug during penalty.

Playability 74%
Quite a fun game especially for two players.

Addictive qualities 67%
Not likely to be a lasting game, its shortcomings will begin to annoy you sooner or later

Value For Money 55%
Poor value when you are faced with so many shortcomings

Overall 68%

DON'T PANIC

Firebird, £2.50 cass

Despite being titled *Don't Panic*, regretably Firebird's Silver range game is not an appearance of Douglas Adam's wares on home computer. In fact *Don't Panic* is an arcade game with a platform slant to it.

The scenario revolves around a hassled droid trying to load the deep space equivalent of a juggernaut with various goods scattered about the warehouse. The hassle comes in because all of the cargo has been mysteriously contaminated with a poisonous toxin, particularly virulent and deadly when it comes to cargo droids. The droid's employers, not being heartless souls, have given the droid a decontamination laser, a blast of this at the ill looking cargo washes all the nastiness out of it. Once you've loaded the ship with sufficient cargo you can trundle off to the next cargo bay. Even though this lifestyle seems bad, things are worse than they seem since hopping about the platforms is a green alien who happens to be hungry and enjoys his standard diet of droid metal).

Don't Panic takes place on four platforms, each one placed above the other, spaced equally apart. Controlling your droid left, right, up and down you can stroll on the ledges and move in between them at certain points. The overall playing area is quite wide, scrolling around your man and wrapping round once you've travelled the length of the cargo bay.

Placed centrally in the cargo bay is the spaceship to which you are trying to ferry the cargo. If you run into any cargo you lose a life but if you fire a laser bolt at it, the item is knocked towards the ship. Blast it off the edge where the ship is situated and it is safely packed away.

The roaming alien, scourge of the spaceport, can move faster

than you and continually chases after you but it can only hop between two platforms. If the monster is hot on your trail, the best tactic is to jump up a couple of levels the next vertical access. On the first ship the vital commodity of galactic importance being ferried is teddy bears. As the sheets go on, the cargo changes and the going gets rougher as nasties such as mutant toads (gasp!) are added to your obstructions.
Control keys: Definable

CRITICISM

1 **Though a nice idea and not that badly executed (Admittedly the scroll ing's a bit jerky), the game is just too hard to allow any real progress. At first it doesn't matter that much since you expect to be rubbish on a new game, but when after a substantial amount of keyboard bashing, you can't even get past the first screen, things start to get a bit dull. The main problem is the porky green alien who will nearly always corner and eat you, not a nice experience at all. The graphics are above average despite being prone to the odd flicker or two, nothing offputting. The sound is fair as well but overall I'm not that impressed — though I can see how some people may well enjoy it. At the price it'd be worth a look at anyway.**

2 Though the game would have seemed fine about a year ago, I'm afraid that compared to the high standard set by other budget companies *Don't Panic* really doesn't make the grade. I felt the graphics were slightly above average but the scrolling was really bad. The top of the screen would first scroll and then half a second later the bottom would follow. *Don't Panic* was also ridiculously hard, I had trouble getting onto the second screen, once there I found it impossible. Not one of Firebird's best I'm afraid.

3 *Having not seen any other releases for the Amstrad from Firebird, I was quite expectant since Firebird's budget software has quite a reputation for other machines. Sadly I felt let down due to the low quality of the program and presentation. The game idea itself is simple but doesn't quite prove the 'simple ideas are best' idiom. Graphics are reasonable until the program makes an attempt to move something about, then all static graphic effects are spoiled as the screen wobbles across the VDU. Also it's ridiculously hard, requiring near super human gaming powers to get past the first screen. Hopefully Firebird will learn from this little mistake.*

Presentation 55%
Not bad but not outstanding either.

Graphics 81%
Quite good with nicely animated monsters roaming around.

Sound 34%
Very sparse.

Playability 38%
Way too difficult and .....

Addictive qualities 45%
... brings down the addictive qualities.

Value for money 63%
Not bad for the price.

Overall 59%
If you need a good challenge at a cheap price it may be worth a look at.

WIZARD'S LAIR

Bubble Bus, £8.95 cass, joystick only

Wizard's Lair is an arcade adventure of massive proportions, 256 locations to be precise. Marketed by Bubble Bus, *Wizard's Lair* is a conversion from the Spectrum original that appeared some time ago and is sold in the now fashionable back-to-back package with the Commodore version on the other side.

The cassette inlay scenario places you in shoes of Pothole Pete, a cave and chasm explorer trapped within a massive subterranean network of interconnecting caves named the Wizard's Lair. Obviously Pete is eager to escape and for some mysteriously unexplained rea son he can only be free once he's collected all four pieces of the Golden Lion. The trouble is that the dismembered lion's component parts have been scattered about into the distant depths of the *Wizard's Lair*.

Populating the many caves are a number of different monsters and various nasties. These creatures of the caves sap your energy, the lifeforce that powers you, if you're careless enough to travel over them. Two characters definitely worth avoiding are the Knights and Executioners, since their touch proves fatal to Pete and loses him one of the five lives he's supplied with.

The different screens are flicked between as you move through the doors and portals interconnecting the caves in the normal arcade adventure fashion. The action is viewed from above, Pothole Pete being shown from a bird's eye view as well as the room details, making a bit of a change from the false perspective employed in most games of this type. The caves are split between seven levels, all interconnected with wardrobe lifts and magic lifts. These sit innocently in the corners of a few of the caves and are activated once you run into them.

To battle the various demons populating the caves you're supplied with a limited amount of weaponry. If you press the fire button, a stream of axes comes spinning out of Pothole Pete, fatal to any baddie you may meet, and quickly depleting your weaponry bar. Totalling a whole cave full of demons is quite easy since the axes haphazardly ricochet off the caves' walls. Once you've run out of axes, you are forced to search the caves for some more. If you come across a small axe lying on the floor just run over it and your weapon status takes a turn for the better. Other useful objects littering the caves' floors include wings, crosses and armour. The wings speed Pete's pace up no end, though the effect is limited. Armour gives temporary protection, while crosses enable obstacles to be passed.

Also left around the *Wizard's Lair* is a fair amount of gold bullion, useless until you pick up a magic spell which allows any collected gold to be converted to the more useful energy, weaponry, keys, rings or diamonds. Keys allow access to a number of otherwise impassable doors.

The caves' scenery changes from level to level, one floor looking particularly like Ultimate's hit *Sabre Wulf* and another resembling the caves from *Atic Atac*. Some bits of the scenery acts as barriers, streams, for example, are impassable unless a bridge is supplied. Once you are unfortunate enough to lose all your lives, your progress is halted and you're informed of your percentage, pieces of lion collected and the final score.

CRITICISM

1 ***Wizard's Lair* was a great game in all its other incarnations, though I'm afraid the Amstrad version really didn't live up to expectations. Though all the gameplay elements inherent to the origin-**

al are still present, the program is very badly executed. The varying speeds at which the sprites move about the room are near unbelievable, the speed changing dramatically as the number of objects moving in the room change. Though being a basically good game, *Wizard's Lair*, just didn't appeal because of its technical ineptitude.

2 Although this is cosmetically similar to Ultimate's Spectrum game, *Atic Atac*, *Wizard's Lair* has a far greater depth of scenario and complexity. Even if the gameplay aspects are excellent, the whole game falls down in the way it's been done. It really surprised me since the program had set such exemplary examples on the previous versions. The graphics are also of a poorer standard than has been achieved previously. My main gripe is the way the program seems to make no attempt to move objects with any smoothness. This would have been fun to play had it not been for the low standard of programming compared to its other versions. All in all a pretty poor bet though some readers may like *Wizard's Lair* I suspect their numbers will be limited.

3 *I must admit I really enjoyed this game despite its poor presentation and cumbersome graphics. The game itself was great to play and some of the features where exceptional. I particularly liked the way gold could be transmuted into other helpful items. The overall goal is hard enough to hold interest but not too hard as to put you off totally. Admittedly the graphics aren't of an exceptional quality though I did find them to be effective. I thought the wardrobe lifts looked very good indeed. Overall a very good game if a little unpolished. Having a few of its rough edges smoothed of wouldn't have gone amiss though.*

Presentation 63%
Above average, though not outstanding.

Graphics 56%
Not up to the standard achievable on the Amstrad, but bearable.

Sound 54%
Simple, unambitious sound which could have been better.

Playability 45%
Made difficult by some of the game's more unusual features.

Addictive qualities 63%
Despite the shortcomings, there is some fun to be had here.

Value for money 61%
Well overpriced considering the limitations of the game.

Overall 54%
Disappointing implementation of what was quite a good game.

THE COMPLETE GAMES INDEX

PART TWO

Amstrad games software has, by now, had a fair time to develop. Much of the earlier material consists of conversions from Spectrum originals, and in turn, many of those were copies of arcade machine games. As is to be expected, a lot of it is dross, and Amstrad owners haven't, by and large, benefitted from the budget-priced software that has appeared for other machines which makes it a reasonable risk to buy ageing games.

Recently, however, the situation has improved, with far better conversions coming along, and some excellent Amstrad originals. The aim of The Complete Guide is to bring you up to date on games software through brief but to-the-point mini-reviews, helping point a way through the minefield that hides both excellence and rubbish in the hype.

We asked ROBIN CANDY to play his way through — well, an awful lot of games and give his opinions. As there are too many games to fit into one issue.

The games are not in any particular order throughout the issue, making categories gets harder as more complex games appear, but there is an index on page 7 to help you find them and a key to suggest the type of game. Each game has been given an AMTIX! Overall rating based on what it would receive if it were to be fully reviewed at this time.

THE SCOUT STEPS OUT

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Controlling a boy scout you must journey around your campsite collecting badges, mushrooms, seaweed and other assorted essential scouting items. The game starts with you and your scout chums around a campfire enjoying some scouting music. You must then follow a succession of arrows which lead you to varied platform screens where the items are to be collected. As with most other platform games there are an assortment of nasties to thwart your attempts, some of which move in regular patterns while others just home in on you.

The Scout Steps Out is an enjoyable game that proves to be addictive. Both the graphics and sound are quite good but not outstanding. As platform games go you can't go far wrong with this one — be prepared.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 71%

BRIDGE IT

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Living in a town surrounded by water influenced some bright spark into building a number of bridges across the water. The aim of *Bridge It* is to get from one house on one side of the bridges to another on the other side. You control the bridges so it is up to you to get you and your friends across the water. The people descend from the top of the screen and you have to lower a bridge for them to cross over, otherwise they will walk into the river.

The idea behind this game is very simple and it soon becomes extremely repetetive and boring this is not helped by the sub-standard graphics and the awful sound. *Bridge It* is now very dated and it's doubtful whether it will appeal to anybody other than the youngest of games players.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 10%

CLASSIC RACING

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Competing in the flat racing season, it is your aim to make as much money as possible. You have 16 horses to race over 16 race meets which consist 6 races in each plus there are the classics at the end of the game.

When you are at a race meeting you find that each race has a rating — minor, principal or classic. Depending on how a race is rated determines the prize money on offer. At the start of the race you have the choice to bet on one of the six horses running in the race. Once you have done that the race is run. After each race you are given any money that is owed to you plus your horses start to build up a form book which should give you an idea as to which horse to pick for a particular race.

Classic Racing is one of the few good horse racing games available on any computer. The graphics are poor for this game but it is very addictive and playable. As a general rule if you like *Football Manager* or *Millionaire* you should enjoy this game even more.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 81%

REVIEWS

3D BOXING

Amsoft, £9.95 cass

Following on from Amsoft Gold's other releases, *3D Grand Prix*, *3D Stuntrider*, is *3D Boxing*, a simulation of the noble sport of hitting people. The idea is for you to reach the final, win the title of world champion and claim the coveted Amsoft Belt! (wow). To become the holder of this obviously wondrous object you have to thrash no less than six different fighters. The various contenders' skill and nastiness increase with every mangled opponent left behind you, each having different strengths and weaknesses.

At the start you are presented with an option menu accompanied by a jolly little melody. There are options for one or two players, and rather than letting you try and beat yourself up, the one player option pits you against the computer's skills.

The game takes place in a full 3D representation of a boxing ring taking up the whole screen, with hordes of spectators crowding around the ringside. The boxers are about a quarter of the screen height tall, your boxer being identified by the colour of his shorts. Each competitor has an energy bar displayed in his corner. Any unblocked blows drain away a boxer's energy, while skillful dodging and weaving allow you to rest and reclaim some lost energy. To win you need to win a round leaving the other fighter with a lot less energy than yourself. Bouts are fought in rounds, each one lasting one and a half minutes.

When you finally get down to fighting there are eight different moves accessable from either joystick or keys. The fight moves are split into two groups, seven for attack and one for defence. The control method is similar to that used in Melbourne House's *Exploding Fist*. The joystick is used for directional control until you press the fire button, you then have access to different fighting moves. Punches available include jabs, hooks and uppercuts, each having their own advantages. Jabs and hooks can be aimed at your opponent's head or body while the uppercut delivers a good old fashioned 'roundhouse' to your opposite number's chin. You are equipped with only one defensive move, a face block which should sway any attack on your precious features. Your midriff is left perilously unguarded and the only manoeuvre available for dodging a body blow is a quick backstep.

The six different boxers are named as follows, Mad Joe, Quasi, Roland, Mik Hail, Ronald and Jef. Included in the packaging is a handy booklet detailing the weaknesses and strengths of the various contenders. The first five boxers all have their weaknesses but Jef, boxer number six, seems to be pretty near perfect and is almost unbeatable.

Control keys: Player 1: W/A hook head/body; A/S face block/uppercut; WA/SZ jab head/body; AZ/WS jab body/head; Player 2 uses different combinations of keys.

CRITICISM

1 **Boxing games seem to be this year's answer to last year's craze for platform games. Amsoft's attempt to jump on the bandring is quite creditable, the impressive graphics coupled with the convincing 3D make *3D Boxing* immediately playable. Things begin to fall down once you start playing the game seriously. When up against a really good opponent, you can end up playing for up to fifteen rounds which can get a bit dull. The joystick control works quite well and you'll soon find it quite easy to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee. Despite the high standard of graphics and easy control there's still no getting away from the game's perpetual dullness and why it has been launched under Amsoft Gold I'll never know.**

2 Yeah, what a great idea. Let's put someone into a coma, only in a boxing game. I have to admit, boxing games are a bit dull as far as I'm concerned. There's nothing new and exciting in the way of screens; just more deadly opponents to battle. If you like the idea of slugging it out for several rounds with acceptably animated characters, then you could find this game to your liking. There are no absolutely damning flaws in the game. But there is little long term appeal in these sophisticated forms of fisticuffs and I suspect they will all soon fall into oblivion, which, to be honest is where I think they belong.

3 3D Boxing *is in an unfortunate situation. As a game, it isn't really that bad, even if it is lacking a little in depth. The problem is that being on the 'Gold' label, people may well expect it to be better than the norm and the plain fact is — it isn't! The characters look terribly elastic and the 3D effect (as you may have guessed) is out of perspective. It does respond well to the joystick, but this isn't that much of a saving grace. I had hoped for something more. There is a sense of achievement first time you win a bout, but after that the whole affair sinks to the level of repetitive tedium. Even the names of the other boxers aren't that imaginative. Not a total failure for boxing addicts.*

Presentation 71%
Usual Amsoft mundane package.

Graphics 82%
The men may look slightly elastic but they are well animated.

Sound 61%
There isn't much you can do with sound on this kind of game — so Amsoft didn't try.

Playability 62%
Learning to make the right move at the right time is going to take a while.

Addictive qualities 53%
Boxing has had its heroes but none of them are likely to be seen on the Amstrad.

Value for money 54%
For the amount of game you get, it's a bit much at the price.

Overall 69%
The variety and speed form the main saving graces of this game.



MATCH DAY

Ocean, £8.95 cass

Asthe title suggests, *Match Day* is yet another sports simulation, this one trying the capture the thrills and spills of football.

Once you get into the game there's a quick rendition of the 'Match of the Day' theme tune while all the players stand to attention and then it's into the kickoff. The game is viewed from a forced angle perspective through a window on a scrolling pitch about four screen's size. Control is automatically given to the player of your team nearest to the ball; you know who you're controlling since the player's football boots turn to gold, well yellow maybe. Other players not controlled by you wander about semi-intelligently, usually moving towards the ball. Control over your player is limited to left, right, up, down and kick, though by using various combinations of kick and the direction keys, you can perform a number of different shots. If you judge the angle and speed of the ball correctly it is possible to execute a header, though this is not an easy task. When control comes to the goalie, as the other team gets perilously close to the goalmouth, you can move the goalie left and right while the kick key puts him into a gracefull dive in the direction he is facing.

All the features of the real thing including corners, centres and goal kicks are awarded at the correct times. It seems both teams are impeccable gentleman since there's no penalty or offside. Also there's no referee scampering up and down the pitch though whistle noises are produced at appropriate moments.

If you wish to tailor your football playing environment, there are options accessable through impressive menu and option screens. There are three basic kinds of matches you can play, one player, two player and Matchday Special. The one and two player options are fairly self explanatory, with the computer side taking up the challenge for the one player option. Matchday Special sets up a competition structure, where the teams battle it out to the finals. Matchday Special mode caters for both one and two players with the computer taking up the slack and filling in the spare teams.

On the front end menu you are also allowed to alter a variety of variables from strip colour to length of match. An option for defining your own keys is also included, very handy if you've got a two player game being controlled from the keyboard.

Control keys: Definable.

CRITICISM

1 **About the best thing this game has to offer is the sound and even this isn't brilliant. The Graphics look nice at first but they are slow and gruesome looking. Also there is what I'd call colour clash every now and then when one player runs behind another. There are a number of things that make the 3D effect less convincing, for example before there is a corner or a goal kick, a player runs over the top of the goal to collect the ball. When the ball is in the air it is impossible to judge where it is above the pitch and how far up it is, so you can't tell when it's going to land. Controlling your player is not hard until you've lost possession. Then you have to work out who it is. This takes time which can often be the governing factor as to whether you get possession or not. Not exactly my recommendation of the month!**

2 Despite being very good in it's previous incarnation, *Match Day* on the Amstrad just doesn't hit the mark. The front end facilities are still as flexible and competent as the Spectrum version but the

ALEX HIGGINS' WORLD POOL

Amsoft, £8.95

This version of pool is played in the standard computer format. You control a cursor and move it where you wish the cue ball aimed. You also have options where you can set your spin and the ball speed. After a bit of practice you should be able to pot most of the balls. There are a total of 15 balls which are dived into two sets of seven, one marked with stripes the other with spots, plus there is a black 8 ball. One player must pot all the stripes and the black ball while the other must pot all the spots and the black ball.

As pool/snooker games go this is quite a good one but it doesn't quite measure up to *Steve Davis Snooker*. The graphics move jerkily and the balls aren't even very round. *Alex Higgins' Pool* may appeal to pool/snooker fans but there are better games about.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 39%

MYRIDDIN FLIGHT SIMULATION

Myriddin Software, £11.95 cass

Instead of having you flying around shooting enemy craft down, this flight simulation has you searching the landscape for certain 3D shapes in a Dingbat. The view is from the cockpit with the usual display of instrumentation just below the horizon. There are 16 skill levels to choose from plus a map of the flying area is provided with the game.

The graphics feature some nice 3D shapes but once these have all been seen the game begins to get boring. Piloting the Dingbat is not overly hard but it can be very frustrating at first. What lets the game down is its slow screen update and pathetic sound. On the whole it is a reasonable simulation but overpriced.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 56%

THE WILD BUNCH

Firebird £2.50 cass

Having been falsely accused of murder you are out to clear your name by tracking down five ruthless killers known throughout the land as the Wild bunch. At the start of the game you are given a description of the real murderer and a Colt 45 as a weapon.

When you are in a town you can gamble to get money for better equipment and provisions or you can go to the Sheriff's office for information on the wild bunch. You must constantly be alert for the Pinkerton agent who is out to bring you to justice. There are five towns all together and the Wild Bunch is scattered around them. On travelling between towns you encounter all manner of nasties that sap your strength and can eventually kill you.

Most of the game is spent playing poker which, while fun, becomes very repetitive. What lets the game down badly are the graphics and the sound which are terrible. On the whole *The Wild Bunch* is quite original but lacks real lasting appeal, quite good value for the money however.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 62%

AMSGOLF

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

In this golfing simulation, you view the golf course from above in plan. Equiped with a full bag of golf clubs, it is your aim to have an enjoyable and rewarding game of golf as possible. When taking a shot you must decide which club to use, how hard to hit the ball and in what direction. Once you have got the ball onto the green the direction is automatically assumed.

Golfing games aren't the most awe-inspiring programs on any computer but this one is quite enjoyable, although it suffers from too much simplicity in setting up strokes to have great playing appeal. Assuming that you like golf, you should find *Amsgolf* a lightweight enjoyment but better graphics and sound would have improved it no end.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 45%

game is just awful. The graphics are indistinct and poorly conceived while the routine that moves them about is abysmally slow. The men don't move behind or in front of each other but change into different colours, with horrible colour clash. Even when stationary, the sprites flicker.

The way the ball behaves, you wouldn't know that laws pertaining to the movement of an object in a gravitational field had even been written down. Really, this game is overpriced and unimpressive. Well worth a miss.

3 *Match Day is not very inspiring. The insipid and incompetent use of colour is dreadfully disappointing. It is something of a challenge to produce good games of this ilk but with all the best will in the world, this one falls down in so many places, it's really not worth the effort. As far as I could see, it doesn't have any saving graces at all, and is a sad reflection on the surprising excellence of the Spectrum original. Good laugh for one or maybe two games but in essence, a tragedy.*

Presentation 88%
Excellent choice of game setup.

Graphics 39%
Amateurish at best.

Sound 43%
Unfortunately forgettable.

Playability 32%
Noticeable by its absence.

Addictive qualities 34%
Unlikely to inspire any enthusiasm at all.

Value for money 32%
Would be a risky purchase even if it were budget priced.

Overall 37%
The real thing costs far less and will be emminently more rewarding.

DYNAMITE DAN

Mirrorsoft, £7.95 cass

Yet another conversion from our old friend the Spectrum comes to Amtix Towers in the form of *Dynamite Dan*. The inevitable despicable baddie has locked away the love of Dan's life in a large safe. Ever heroic, Dan decides upon a plan of collecting some dynamite and blowing the safe wide open. The safe is placed in a large mansion along with neccessary dynamite. The only obstacles barring the way to a tender reunion are the inhabitants of the mansion. Not exactly after your blood, they mindlessly patrol along their routes but to touch them is fatal.

Hyperactive Dan does need his provisions to keep him going or his energy bar depletes rapidly, losing him yet more lives. Around the mansion, there are various little snacks that should hit the right spot (ie the energy bar).

The presentation is very similar to the now legendary *Jet Set Willy* using the much copied flick screen technique. Dan arrives on the scene in style, hopping out of a basket underslung beneath an airship. Movement is of the normal left, right and jump variety though other methods of travel should soon make themselves obvious. Along the bottom of the mansion runs a subterranean river along which travels a small raft. If Dan gets down to depths of the mansion it's possible for him to jump down onto the raft and stay on it, as long as he keeps walking. To get down to zero level it's best to use the lift, making stops at all floors.

On the difficult screen, temporary invulnerability would come in handy, attainable if you manage to find a weapon. In some rooms there are trampolines that extend your jumping range — by continually bouncing it's possible to jump right out of and through the next screen. A bit of nastiness on the programmer's side is the random placing of the dynamite with each game, and wherever it is placed, it's in the most difficult spots to reach. Initially, you are given ten lives and though this seems excessive, it's certain that you're going to need at least twice as many.

Control keys: Definable.

CRITICISM

1 **What an excellent platform game. I didn't think this one would survive the conversion on to the Amstrad as the blocky graphics might spoil it but I must say that it is just as compelling and playable (if not more so) as the Spectrum version. The graphics are well animated and nicely drawn and the whole concept of the wraparound mansion is fascinating. There is often a lot of action on screen so the graphics are never dreary or boring. The sound is fabulous, although after a long while I'm sure it will drive me barmy. *Dynamite Dan* has sufficient new twists to the classic exploration, jumping platformer to make it compelling and fun to play and I would strongly recommend it to everyone. This is the one platform game that you must get.**

2 Platform games are a bit old hat now but *Dynamite Dan* has a few new features that make it a really interesting game. The idea behind the game makes it very easy to play and initially it is a very exciting game — the challenge of completing it can keep you addicted for a long time. Unfortunately the graphics aren't brilliant but they are not terrible either. Sound is reasonable but I'm sure the the Amstrad is capable of much greater things in this department. Don't let the poor quality of graphics put you off buying it because it is a very enjoyable game.

3 *When we played this game, it was greeted with mixed feelings. There was a certain amount of discontent because apparently, Mirrorsoft had done a straight conversion which meant that the graphics were more colourful than on the original but lacking in detail. After much arguing and*



beating about other people's heads, the general conclusion was that the game was still a lot of fun anyway. I must admit, I agree with this verdict. After overcoming my original reservations, I found the game to be fairly addictive and enjoyable. Platform games have some life left in them yet, it seems!

Presentation 83%
Plenty of options, user definable keys and built in instructions make this a well presented game.

Graphics 69%
Fail to take advantages of the machine's capabilities but colourful, nonetheless.

Sound 71%
Competent but not exceptionally well executed.

Playability 82%
As with most platform games, very playable.

Addictive qualities 77%
Rather hackneyed but some will find it worthwhile.

Value for money 81%
At least Mirrorsoft price their games well.

Overall 80%
Some good ideas and gameplay but marred by slightly primitive graphics.

GAMES INDEX

ALIEN

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Based on the popular film of the same name *Alien* puts you in charge of the Nostromo's crew searching your ship in a bid to kill the monstrous alien. The game's form is more that of a strategy, although there are adventure overtones. It starts with one of the crew members being killed by the alien, you now control the remaining crew and by trapping the alien in certain areas of the ship you must formulate a strategy to get rid of it. Scattered about the ship are plenty of items that must be utilised if you wish to succeed. Should one of your people be captured by the alien then there is little you can do to help them and it is only a matter of time before they are killed.

Alien manages to capture the atmosphere of the original movie excellently. It can get very tense just wondering where the monster is, and this pervading fear also affects the morale of your crew and how well they behave. The graphics are above the usual strategy game standard but could still be improved upon and the sound, though there isn't much of it, plays an important part in the game. Beware the initial frustration which can prove too much for some people.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 71%

QUACK A JACK

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Appearing as a duck you must progress through a 16-level dungeon crunching eggs before they hatch while all the time you are being pursued by monsters. There are five eggs to crush but all the time you are moving the floor is dissolving under your feet. There's also treasure on the screens but you automatically move on to the next screen once you have destroyed all the eggs.

Quack a Jack is a fast moving game but there isn't that much to it. In fact after a couple of goes it becomes very dull and the sound and graphics add nothing to it. Not a brilliant game but it may be enjoyable to a few people.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 48%

JAMMIN'

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Playing Rankin' Rodney you have to get together four instruments. These are scattered throughout a maze. The changing colour the maze indicates whether or not an instrument is in that area. Altogether there are a total of 20 screens but there are a few problems because there are some non-musical enemies who are out to stop you. Of these the discords are the worst and if you run into any you lose a life.

The best feature of this game is the music which is superb. The graphics and gameplay are reasonable and if there is a lack of lasting appeal it's worth playing just to hear the music.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 68%

HUNCHBACK

Ocean/Amsoft, £8.95 cass

The arcade original of this game appeared some years ago so it is a bit dated by today's standards consequently, as no extra work has been done on it, the Amstrad version is showing its age.

Playing Quasimodo (the famous hunchback of Notre Dame) you must progress across the crenellations and battlements to rescue your heart throb, Esmerelda. Guarding the castle are vicious knights with spears, and fireballs and arrows are constantly being thrown at you. The basic screen layout remains the same for each but each screen has either a new hazard or a combination of hazards that appeared in previous screens that make it unique It's very much a 'pattern' game, where to win, you must learn its rhythms.

Graphics and sound are a bit boring, it would have been nice to have a decent tune in the game somewhere. Initially the game is very playable but once you have seen most of the screens interest is soon lost due to the similarity of each sheet. *Hunchback* is a reasonable platform-style jumping game but nothing to shout about.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 45%

HUNCHBACK II

Ocean, £8.95 cass

The sequel to the classic arcade game has ol' Quasi leaping about the belfry trying and rescue Esmerelda (Damsel in distress) all over again.

On all the screens except the last, Quasi has to collect all the smaller bells in order to progress to the next screen. On the last screen he must ring the larger bells with hammers. Each differs from the previous one and gets progressively harder.

If you liked the first game then you are bound to enjoy the sequel which is more varied and a bit harder. The graphics are quite good as is the sound the only problem with the game being its frustration levels on the later screens. Generally a good sequel though there are only five screens to contend with.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 69%

ROLAND GOES DIGGING

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Roland Goes Digging is very similar to the arcade game 'Space Panic'. You must dig holes for the aliens to fall into so that you can kill them. The playing area is all on one screen with five levels that are interconnected via randomly generated ladders. There are a couple of different types of alien that have to fall through more than one floor. Once you have got an alien trapped in a hole you have to go and finish it off by bashing it through the hole before it can drag itself out and come after you.

This type of game is extremely dated now, and while this version is a good copy it has added no improvements to the graphics so that it looks very old. *Roland goes Digging* is a very playable game but the tasks of digging holes and bashing aliens demands little in the end.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 45%

SURVIVOR

ANIROG
£6.95 cass

Trapped in a seven storey house, you must find your way out again. Each level has 144 rooms all of which contain various nasties and bags of treasure. On each level you must collect the porcupine bombs to be able to progress to the next level.

There are four different types of monster to contend with and each one has different characteristics that distinguish them from each other. Should you bump into then you will lose some of your precious energy, which can be replenished by collecting bottles. If you wish, you can despatch the monsters with your limited supply of bullets, but these can be replenished by collecting the guns.

Survivor is a highly enjoyable platform game with graphics and sound that are quite good for the type. The random placing of the bombs makes for an unpredictable game. Fans of platform games will enjoy this game immensely but after a while it does get a bit repetitive.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 59%

GAMES INDEX

BINKY

Software Projects, £5.95 cass

Here we have a sort of cross between a 'Q-Bert' and a 'Painter' game. Controlling Binky you must cover a 3D floor with a coat of paint. Later floors require you to paint 2 or 3 coats. The playing area is restricted to the floor layout — if you walk off the end of the floor then you lose a life. Just to make the task a little bit harder there are a number of nasties which kill on contact. The only mysterious part of the game is the inclusion of a cheat mode.

For straight arcade action *Binky* is quite fun but not very taxing, and it does tend to become repetetive after a while. The graphics and sound are only average.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 52%

ELECTRO FREDDY

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

With the threat of redundancy hanging over his head Electro Freddy must shift the computer goods from Uncle Claude's warehouse to the shops. You have to put the goods on the conveyor but you must beware of Claude who somewhat impolitely shoots the occasional Spectrum and Oric at you. Altogether there are fifteen levels of frantic fun.

While the graphics aren't up to much the game can prove surprisingly addictive and very playable but once you have seen all the levels (quite hard to do) it doesn't take long for interest to wane. A fast and furious arcade game but there isn't much to look at.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 55%

SPANNERMAN

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Playing a local Plumber, you have to save the day (and half of Britain) from a Nuclear explosion. This explosion will be caused by a Nuclear reactor if you can't actually cool it down. There are a number of pipes with five joints on each which have to be tightened when they start to leak a bit like in *Super Pipeline II*. If water leaks out then it gathers at the bottom of the screen. You can only survive a few moments so you have to be quick if there is a leak at the bottom of the screen. Hazards come in the form of giant mutated rats and falling debris that is caused by the earthquake which started the disaster. The only problem with the scenario is that you can't actually win.

Graphics and sound are both poor and this puts you off the game. Though the game is initially addictive interest is soon lost because the game is only one screen and becomes repetetive after a while.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 31%

DETECTIVE

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Detective, based on 'Cluedo', has you in a nine-room house where you must solve a murder mystery. To complete the game you must discover the murderer his or her motive and the weapon used etc. When it is your turn to play, a die is thrown to determine how many rooms you can



move through in that go. The use of Yes and No answers makes the game very similar to the pocket Mastermind game but this tends to ruin all the fun.

Detective is best played in a group where there is quite a bit of competitive spirit otherwise it is easy to lose interest in the game very quickly. The graphics and sound could have been improved upon a lot to make the game more exciting because graphically it is very boring to look at. This is the type of game played at a party or after the Christmas dinner but it's definitely nothing to rave over.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 25%

FLIGHT PATH 737

Anirog, £6.95 cass

Piloting a commercial airliner, your task is to take off from one airport and land your plane on the other side of a mountain range on another airfield. On higher skill levels this is made all the more difficult by cross winds and shorter runways. Should you crash (you only have enough fuel for one landing) then you are told the reason why. If you land you are given a score depending on your performance. Your view is similar to most flight simulations ie from the cockpit with your instrument panel displayed below the view of the horizon.

Flight Path 737 is not one of the easiest of simulations — in fact it is quite hard and unfortunately very frustrating if you are a beginner. Sound is limited and the graphics are only average, with some very unrealistic take off effects. Generally far below standard.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 35%

GILLIGAN'S GOLD

Ocean, £6.90 cass

Scattered throughout the three-screen mine are bags of gold which you, Gilligan, want to collect. Unfortunately the mine is patrolled by two outlaws who are out for your blood. Each sack of gold must be returned and placed into a trolly. Also in the mine are pickaxes and trollies. If you are lucky it is possible to climb onto a trolly and be taken to another screen but you must be careful otherwise it may well run you over instead. Pickaxes can be used to stun the outlaws but you must move quickly because it doesn't take long before they are back on their feet again.

Due to the distinct lack of screens the game isn't too addictive but it is playable for a while. Graphics are quite good but sadly the sound is very limited. Quite a novel approach to a platform game but sadly it hasn't quite been pulled off.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 71%

JET BOOT JACK

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Originally created a while back,JBJ has translated well on to the Amstrad. Controlling JBJ, you must work your way through 10 screens of arcade action collecting musical notes as you go. Unfortunately the factory isn't a safe one and is full of broken platforms and, worse still, monsters.

This turns out to be fairly run of the mill platform without many new things to offer except you can now duck under objects as well as jump over them. Graphics are good and so is the sound but the game tends to become frustrating and eventually boring. IF you're really into platform games then give this one a try.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 72%

GHOULS

Micro Power, £6.95 cass

Though the tile may make the game sound like a 'Pacman' variant it is in fact an extremely frustrating platform game. You control a Pacaman-like ghoul which you must guide to the top right-hand side of the screen. Moving up the screens you gobble jewels and dots.

The game is a very fast one which requires split second precision if you wish to have a hope of completing the four screens. As well as difficult terrain there are also a few nasties with which to contend. A ghost patrols the platforms and slowly homes in on you but luckily it can be disabled for a while by gobbling a jewel.

The basic idea behind *Ghouls* is quite good but the game is so frustrating that you can be put off within a couple of goes. The graphics are not that good but there are some nice sound effects. A reasonably good platform game that proves a bit too fast and difficult to warrant long time interest.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 59%

MUTANT MONTY

Artic/Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Monty has got to collect gold from 40 screens — as usual, a less than easy task and one which requires some nifty joystick handling. On the 40 screen there is a direly distressed damsel (naturally) to rescue. The gold that Monty must collect is hidden in all the hardest places to reach and is guarded by a weird assortment of nasties that are intent on killing him . . . The only bonus is that the aliens all follow regular patterns so that good timing can get you through most sticky situations. Lives are lost by bumping into aliens or if the time limit on each screen runs out.

The main difference between *Mutant Monty* and most other platform games is that Monty doesn't jump. On the whole the game is enjoyable but a bit repetitive. The graphics and sound tend to let the game down slightly but the desire to see the next screen keeps you going.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 53%

HAUNTED HEDGES

Micromega/Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Essentially this is a 'Pacman' style game with the novelty factor that the maze is drawn in a sort of 3D, so that some of the walls hide the dots and even your man from time to time. The aim of the game is to guide your stick man around the maze picking up gold coins (dots). To make life difficult there are the usual four guardians patrolling the maze who kill on contact. Also scattered about in the maze are several ice picks that work like power pills in Pacman, just pick one up and you can get rid of the guardians for a while.

For Pacman fanatics *Haunted Hedges* may prove a nice little game but it is dated (as it was on the Spectrum when released) and on the whole it's a bit boring and very unoriginal. Graphics and sound are average but the game is playable. It would have been better value for money had it been budget software.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 47%

MR FREEZE

Firebird, £2.50 cass

De-icing six compartments in a fridge may be a simple task unless you're faced with nasties such as robots, ice cubes and flying frozen food sitting between you and the de-icer box.

You can de-ice any of the boxes in what ever order you wish but once you have managed to climb to the top of one screen to de-ice one compartment, you must return to the bottom of the screen again. This journey is as hazardous as the one to get to the top.

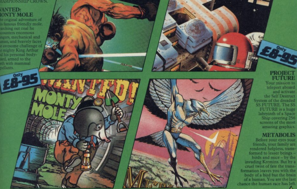
Mr Freeze is a fun game to play for a while but soon becomes boring and repetitive. The graphics are below average and sound is poor. Definitely not an awe inspiring game, despite its budget price.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 43%

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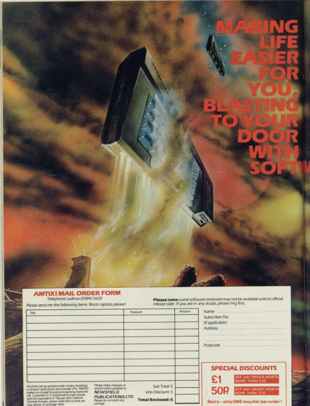
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SOUTHERN BELLE

Hewson Consultants, £7.95 cass
Author: Mike Male and Bob Hillyer

The authors of this game are in fact air traffic controllers which may seem a little removed from the world of chuff chuffs. However you may remember that Mike wrote Hewson's *Heathrow Air Traffic Control*, and his colleague, Bob, is the chuff-chuff-nut, so the the writing of what must be the first steam train simulation isn't such an unnatural progression from Mike's earlier work. The simulation is based on the workings of a King Arthur class locomotive, typically used on the London to Brighton route. In those great and glorious days of railway travel, the carriages on that route were so luxurious that the train came to be known as the Southern Belle.

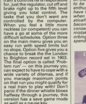
During your second stage of life you may have dreamt of being an engine driver, but it really isn't as easy as you might like to think. The Hewson simulation goes a long way to introducing the practical difficulties that might be met by an engine driver, particularly one on the Southern Belle route. But, should you simply want to 'have a ride' on a steam train, then the authors have provided a demo mode that presents you with a high speed, expertly driven journey from London to Brighton, something along the lines of that well known black and white film that took you along the entire route in only 30 seconds. The instructions that come with the game are divided into two sections. The first section could be usefully read while the game is loading, as it introduces the concepts and helps you come to terms with the complicated controls.

The instructions detail how a steam engine works, and that knowledge is important if you are to appreciate the effects of the various controls, or indeed even why some of them are necessary. Also, there are a number of regulations that must be observed, like those relating to the use of the whistle. When you 'drive' the train at the highest level you will be marked down for a number of faults, including not observing any pertinent rules, failing to keep good time, poor fuel economy and general reckless driving.

The instruments that can be seen on screen by the driver, and therefore the player, include the water and pressure gauges and the position of the various control levers: the regulator, controls the flow of steam to the cylinders; cut off, determines at which part of the cylinder cycle steam is admitted; vacuum brake, five degrees of braking power; the blower, used to prevent gas and sparks coming into the cab when the train is in a tunnel; the injectors, regulate the water flow from the tank to the boiler and finally, the dampers which regulate the volume of air flowing into the firebox.

The firebox must be kept stoked and fuelled to provide the maximum safe temperature: a simple operation in itself, but while a key press is enough to shovel in some more coal, don't forget to open the firedoor first! Keeping a fire in is one thing, but as any good driver will tell you, you must look at the smoke coming from the engine to determine just how efficient it is. For example, very light smoke means that too much air is getting into the fire while dark smoke means you should let more air in.

Outside the cab itself another section keeps you informed about your water and coal stocks, speed, and the condition of any signals on the line. The all-important railway clock hasn't been left out either. If you make any mistakes on a run then a message appears at the bottom of the screen telling you where you have gone wrong: 'BLOWBACK, CREW INCAPACITATED', for instance, means that you failed to open the blower when entering a tunnel.

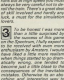


Given the complexity of the task in hand it's as well that the authors have provided a number of different difficulty levels. The easiest, 'the training run' follows the same schedule as the demonstration, but the player can choose which of the train's controls he is responsible for, just the regulator, cut off and brake right up to the fifth level giving you total control. The tasks that you don't want are controlled by the computer. When you feel a little more reckless (or competent) you can have a go at some of the more difficult schedules. Option three on the main menu gives you an easy run with speed limits but no stops. Option five gives you a chance to break the the London to Brighton record set in 1903. The final option is called 'Problem run' — on this journey you can expect to have to cope with a wide variety of dilemas, and if you manage maximum points on that run you might qualify for a real train to play with! Don't panic if the dinner whistle blows halfway through a journey, this version has a save game mode as well as a pause key.

CRITICISM

1 **I first saw this game on the Spectrum and was a little panic stricken then, when I was asked to review it. My knowledge of trains has improved a little since my earlier attempts but I am still not a train buff. As with the Spectrum version the game came with a wadge of instructions explaining how a steam train worked. I had always thought it was just a case of add coal and water and hold on tight — now I am convinced that it's a great deal easier to fly the simulated planes than drive this train. Hewson, in their wisdom have allowed for all levels of abilities from just being a passenger to full scale panic. *Southern Belle* contains some well drawn graphics, they appear to scroll a little better than on the Spectrum version if a little more slowly. The overall effect works quite well. If you like simulations then this one must be a techno-nut's delight, watching all the dials and gauges and levers. I certainly recommend this to those of you who enjoy simulations and those who tend towards the mechanical side of life.**

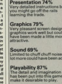
2 My first impression of Southern Belle *was quite different to my final verdict. This is a very complicated simulation providing a great deal of variation. The game is hard to come to terms with because there is so much to do and you are kept very busy, but once mastered, it's brilliant. The job becomes very exciting and involved when attempting speed runs but at high speed you must always be very careful not to derail the train. There's a great deal of skill involved and hardly any luck, a must for the simulation lovers.*

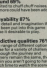


3 *To be honest I was more than a little surprised by the success of this game on the Spectrum, I fully expect it to be received with even more enthusiasm by Amsters. I would have liked a little more realism when things started to go dramatically wrong, one tended to become just a little blasé to the consequences of the inevitable mistakes. Otherwise its an absorbing and interesting way to spend to spend an evening.*











Presentation 74%
Very detailed instructions but you might go off the rails learning the trade.

Graphics 79%
Very pleasant screen design, graphics work well but could have been made a little more attractive.

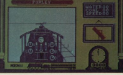
Sound 69%
Limited to chuff chuff noises, a lot more could have been added.

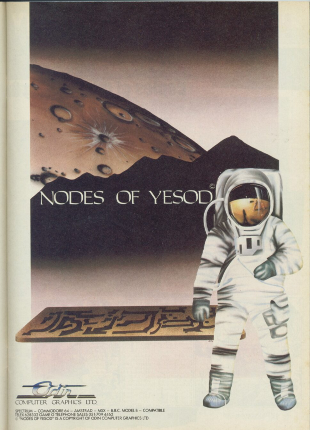
Playability 87%
The detail and imagination that has been put into this game make it desirable to play.

Addictive qualities 76%
The range of different options make for a variety of challenges although the journey and scenery remain the same, then again you aren't going to have much time to watch the scenery.

Value For Money 90%
A below average price for an above average game.

Overall 82%
King of the simulations, as well a being a unique game.




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When it comes down to it, hacking can get to be a really expensive hobby. Apart from the fines that the odd court appearance can clock up, there's the cost of all those expensive modems, not to mention the telephone time. Five point whatsit pee per unit, including VAT as Fearsome Franco, Newsfield Financial Guru keeps reminding us. Just because British Telecom's been privatised it doesn't mean that shareholders can get a cheap hack together. Certainly not — you pays the same amount of loot for telephone time whether you're a shareholder or not.

The chaps and chapesses at **Activision** have come up with quite a neat idea, all things considered. A game called *Hacker* in which you get to hack — but without all those tedious bills. You also stand absolutely zero chance of being arrested. (No-one makes a film about you, either . . .)

In *Hacker* the game, you stumble upon a computer system which you can't resist exploring . . . . the rest is up to you!

Activision have sponsored this AMTIX! Competition just for fun. You can win, if you're really lucky, a **GEC Datachat Modem**. That's first prize — but don't worry, if the concept of high phone bills is too frightening, you could always decide to be one of the twenty nine runners-up! (THEY pick up a copy of *Hacker* the game, and won't be tempted by modems . . .) "Apply your mind", my Great Auntie Minionette always used to say, "and you're bound to succeed." I could never understand why anyone, other than a beakless budgie, should wish to suck seed, but then I WAS only five at the time. I think I understand Auntie's philosophy better nowadays, but this is all fairly irrelevant. I know you're just champing at the bit, dying to find out how to enter. So here goes:

Art Supremo OLIVER FREY, has put together this bijou drawingette for your delectation. As you can see, it's a typical scene from the life of an addicted bulletin board user, hacker and general modem user. The dregs of coffee lurk in cup, the ashtray (filthy habit) overfloweth — and the computer is on. The modem is active and the computer is straining at the leash . . . trouble is, the two scenes are slightly different. Spot the differences, ring them round on picture B and whizz your entry into HACKING COMP, AMTIX! PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE, SY8 1DB to reach us by 16th December. Please make sure you include the word AMTIX! on the entry address to make post sorting easier — thank you!



A

Name ....

Address ....

Postcode ....

B

, HACK

ame up

AMTIX COMPETITION

BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS

Solar Software, £8.95, cass

Despite the title, this is not one of the many film 'tie-ins' so popular at the moment. In fact it's a straight forward shoot em up. You control a spaceship at the bottom of the screen which can be moved left or right. You hover in space whilst waves of multi-coloured aliens attack you with bombs or by crashing into your vessel. You have to avoid the ships and their deadly weaponry and send return fire to kill them off.

There are five skill levels to choose from, One being the easiest and progressing upwards. There are five different waves of aliens. If you manage to get through them, you return to the first wave but on a higher level. You play on a colourful star background and there are sound effects for different weapons and explosions. On the fifth screen the space mines enter play. Destruction of these causes showers of deadly photons. Beware.

To begin with, you have five ships but if you succeed in getting through five screens, there are bonus ships to be had. There is no obvious conclusion to the game, other than a player's inability to get any further. Otherwise the routine seems to repeat itself (albeit modified) ad infinitum. You do not need a joystick to play this game, though it could be useful.

Control keys:Z (LEFT); X (RIGHT); SPACE (FIRE)

CRITICISM

1 *Battle Beyond The Stars*, **Solar Software. This is one of those old shoot em ups, the type of which I haven't seen for about eight months. Graphics are quick, yet unvaried, the sound is mainly spot FX and after a while it starts to get up your nose. Playabilty is quite good for the first few goes but it gets very boring after that. I wouldn't buy this one as it is so primitive.**

2 I was certain this type of game was left far back in the ancient history of computer gaming. When everything is said and done, it's still the old left, right and fire game and a pretty poor one at that. The authors seem to think that if they made the game extremely hard-to-unplayable proportions, it would become addictive because of the frustration appeal. The trouble is that after so many initial failures you soon don't want to play it any more. The graphics are colourful but crude and move jerkily. The sound effects are all right though but that hardly makes *Battle Beyond the Stars* a worthwhile buy.

3 *What you have here is basically a poor revamp of a dull arcade game. As graphics are in mode 0, they are colourful and animated but chunky as a result, pretty for about the first two minutes. By then they have begun to pall — significantly. Attempts to stop yourself from falling asleep provide most of the challenge from this point on. There are plenty of better ways to spend your money and I suggest you use them.*

Presentation 52%
Acceptable introduction and packaging.

Graphics 38%
Colourful but primitive.

Sound 61%
Good effects but too few and far between.

Playability 59%
Instantly playable but only because there is so little to the game.

Addictive qualities 33%
Repetitive graphics do little to enthuse.

Value for money 26%
Might be more reasonable at £2.50.

Overall 39%
Out of date and over priced.

THE SECRET DIARY OF ADRIAN MOLE

Level 9/Mosaic Bookware, £9.95 cass
Author: Richard Kelly, Caroline Holden

Just about everyone (except perhaps those trappist monks in the Welsh heartlands who have locked themselves away in solitary confinement never to see the light of day again) has surely heard of Adrian Mole. There are his two diaries, he's just had a telly program based around his exploits, he's also been on numerous chat shows and now he's on a computer game. What next?

Although the writers of this program are Level 'fab 'n' brill 9 *Adrian Mole* cannot really be classed as an adventure — it's more of a decision game. At regular intervals during the game you are asked to step into Adrian's (sanitised) shoes and make the decisions for him. For example, Adrian gets a spot. Do you squeeze it, bung on some cream or just ignore it? Each decision either awards or takes away points from your total percentage depending on how successful the move was. Each percentage has a rating starting from *average schoolboy* to goodness knows what — we haven't completed it yet.

There are graphics constantly on screen and which regularly update during the course of the game. Most of the pictures are based on the illustrative themes found in the original book. The text also, is based very much on the original work by Sue Townsend. Most of the time, the text scrolls through in the form of a computerised book, before options are presented to the player.

The game at least matches the traditional Level 9 format in terms of appearance. The screen is split into a graphics window in the top half and text window in the bottom half. Because of the lack of text input and the rather channelled nature of the game, it isn't possible to skip through certain areas of the plot, the way you could in standard Level 9 fare. Finding a route through this game is likely to cause some real headaches.

The Secret DIARY OF ADRIAN MOLE aged 13¾
SUE TOWNSEND
Program by LEVEL 9
MOSAIC BOOKWARE
THE COMPUTER GAME

CRITICISM

1 **It seems that Level 9 have come up with the solution to the problem of making multiple choice questions interesting. Some of the options and their conclusions are very funny indeed. Making a game out of the idea is, however, not so much of a good thing. Most of the time you are reading the same stuff that appears in the book (and that's a lot cheaper). Level 9 have come out with some excellent games — and I'm not criticising the quality of the programming — but I don't feel that this really works as a game, too well.**

2 I had my doubts when asked to play *Adrian Mole*, but I can assure you they have gone now. Level 9 have got to have a hit with this one. There are millions of Mole fans who will be very pleased to see that they have done justice to the guy. It's full of funny situations with witty solutions and the enjoyment of taking part in Adrian's decision making is something that just does not pall. I can see the lack of real action putting some people off, but otherwise this is a game you should get — right now.

3 *More games of this standard would be really welcome. There's not enough of this kind of stuff on the market. There were times while playing, where I disagreed with the 'right' decision and this was annoying at first. Of course I soon learned that once into the spirit of it, you learn to take the whole affair with a pinch of salt. That's when the game start to become fun. If you're not an* Adrian Mole *fan to start with, this program could easily convert you. It will certainly not put you off . . .*

```
There has been a slice of bacon between
the cooker and the fridge for three
days to my knowledge.

Monday    January 5th.
I, Adrian Mole, score 41 percent, which
makes me a namby-pamby schoolboy.

Tuesday    January 6th   EPIPHANY. NEW
MOON.
                                 (SHIFT)
```

Presentation 82%
Not outstanding for Level 9, but well laid out, nonetheless.

Graphics 79%
Some subtle and witty illustrations — all well drawn.

Sound N/A%
This is the kind of game where lack of sound is not missed.

Playability 89%
No problem!

Addictive qualities 85%
Once the sense of humour grabs you, it's a great way to give your joystick muscles a rest.

Value for money 84%
Very reasonable for such a good game.

Overall 89%
There are some people who will always dislike the adolescent hero, but for the rest of us, this is a classic.

ULTIMATE
PLAY THE GAME

AMSTRAD CPC 464





"ALIEN 8" and "KNIGHTLORE" recommended retail price £9.95 inc VAT. Available from W.H.SMITHS, BOOTS, J.MENZIES, WOOLWORTHS and all good software retail outlets. Also available from ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME, The Green, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire LE6 5JU (P&P are included) Tel: 0530 411485

SOUL OF A ROBOT



Mastertronic, £1.99 cass

After the success of *Nonterraqueous*, Mastertronic has quickly followed on with *Soul of a Robot, Nonterraqueous II*. After the abortive attempt to destroy the super computer, with its steel grip over the unpronounceable planet Nonterraqueous, by a team of dedicated rebels, the computer's stability has taken a turn for the worse as it lapses into binary senility. Old, ill and repaired, the computer threatens to destroy itself and take the planet with it. Obviously the people are desperate and are ready to try anything to save their planet. They don't seem willing to risk themselves though and instead of destroying the mega machine with their bare hands, they create a robot with the mind of a man to realise their hopes for them. Fully aware of its masters' wishes, the robot is troubled at the thought of destroying anything and seeks death for itself. But death is only attainable once the robot reaches the mega computer. Upon meeting, the robot's internal bomb will explode and save the planet.

The course to be taken by the robot is split into a 16 x 16 maze, each segment sub-split into three sections. Cast into the first section you must find a way through to the third section. Travelling through sections is achieved via the teleport system. Use of the teleport is only possible once you've managed to collect the transporter key. Throughout the different sections there are obstacles and creatures barring your way and some manoeuvres are needed to outsmart them.

This is the follow up to *Nonterraqueous* and the presentation of the different caves shows it. The screens are flicked between as you pass the edge of a screen. Only the top two thirds are dedicated for the display of the caverns, the bottom third displays various meters and status readings charting your progress.

The robot has a number of different modes of transport. Its most basic movement is left and right along the floor of the different caverns. Jumping is also available in true *Underwurlde* (Ultimate's spectrum hit) style with the hero taking a flying leap every time you press up or run off the edge of a platform. Pressing **W** allows the height and length of the jump to be altered, handy when leaping between different height platforms. If you wiggle the joystick up and down in a *Decathalon* style frenzy it causes our metal friend to manically wave his arms, each arm stroke pushing him higher into the air. The trouble is that this somewhat jerky flying method drains psyche.

Psyche is a measurement of the robot's energy level and generally how well he's doing. If it does get to zero then the game's over. Falling too far is deadly as well and after a lengthy tumble you may well find the 'Game Over' message flash up. Around the maze the robot is troubled by the obligatory nasties, robot drones patrolling the platforms and coridors. Also a deadly fungus is placed about the sheets and this is best avoided.

CRITICISM

1 **As the follow up of *Nonterraqueous* I think this game is quite good. Although it is completely different in graphics and format to its parent, it has the same feel about it and the same infuriation factor. Graphically it resembles *Underwurlde* on the Spectrum. Your man jumps and bounces off things in virtually the same manner as Saberman. Generally though, the graphics are not breath taking but they do their job all the same. Controlling your man is hard, even with the keys. With a joystick it is awful, as you have to keep one hand on the keyboard to fly or to alter the length of your jump. Add this to the fact that you bounce off walls and objects when you misjump and you have a potentially unplayable game. Sound is a little disappointing. There are only a few spot effects here and there. On the whole I found this game too infuriating to be very playable or addictive.**

2 As a follow up to *Nonterraqueous*, I felt *Soul of a Robot* fared pretty badly, since it didn't really live up to the example set it by its predecessor. The graphics are of a similar style but the movement is terrible with the main character unevenly jerking and stumbling across the screen. The game tends to be a bit boring as well, despite the huge number of screens present. All in all, pretty dull stuff, though it may be worth a look at for £1.99.

3 *I never really like* Nonterraqueous *all that much — a lot of game and all of it very similar. Nice graphics though, and decidedly good value at the budget price. This follow up is somewhat disappointing, with poorer graphics and movement, and if anything even less game content. Still, it's a good price, so possibly worth forking out for.*

Presentation 67%
Effective loading and title screens but a few more options would have been appreciated.

Graphics 79%
Very good in places though the effect is spoiled by the repetitive nature of different screens.

Sound 43%
Beeps and barps in the right places but could have been better.

Playability 62%
Initially a bit awkward but you soon get used to it.

Addictive qualities 64%
A lot of challenge for a little money.

Value for money 81%
Despite the moans and groans, if you haven't got vast sums of money, you could do a lot worse than buy this.

Overall 77%
A shame about the movement and tedium. Spoils an otherwise reasonable game.

FORMULA ONE

Mastertronic, £1.99 cass, joystick only

Formula One is Mastertronic's obligatory attempt at a racing game in the now famous *Pole Position* mould. Driving your formula one racing machine, you must first qualify and then compete in the big race against computer controlled racing minions. To qualify you must complete a lap in a specified time without crashing. Depending on your completion time, you are fully informs you that you've crashed the car.

Should you qualify for the race, you start placed in the grid with the other cars represented in front of you. The race starts and the other competitors seem to be in superior machines to yours as they race off into the distance. Once you finally catch them up it's a case of dodge and weave to crawl up to first place. If you crash there's only the one chance and it's game over but in one respect that's better than the real thing.

given a place in starting grid, the better the time, the higher the position.

Before you decide to race, a music accompanied menu appears allowing you to select the track you wish to race on. The different tracks are displayed graphically with their titles below them. Skipping through with the joystick, you see how the tracks are actual representations of real life race circuits. The different courses include Silverstone, Brands Hatch, Monaco, Hockenheim, Osterreichring, Kyalmi, Zolder, Paul Ricard, Monza and Zandvoort.

The racing track is seen as from the driver's seat. Before you start the race you may choose between either manual or automatic gear change. With manual it is possible to blow your engine by seriously over-revving it. Admittedly, the engine is safe in automatic gear change but it's a little too safe since you can push your car further in manual mode. If you do decide on manual, fire combined with either up or down changes gear. Whilst hurtling down the track, the scenery is a bit sparse, though the odd signpost does flash past on the side of the track. If you overlap the grass verge the screen flashes and the car blows up. After a short wait, the program help-

CRITICISM

1 **Mastertronic do some good games for the price but that can't excuse the fact that this one is a pretty poor game. The background scenery is simple but effective for the most part but the other cars resemble a certain great black monolith taking up a large portion of the screen as they pass. The game is playable in Automatic mode, but then you know that you're not getting the best out of your car. Yet if you switch to manual, your days are almost certainly numbered. I would say that the main reason why this game fails to impress is due to this imbalance in play.**

2 Despite the poor graphics and and difficult play, I thought that this was a reasonably good game. You can choose from a fine selection of tracks easily and get on with the race. Gameplay is a little dodgy but I've seen worse on more expensive games. Mastertronic have done a reasonable job with this game, it won't be remembered as a classic but it's pretty good all the same.

3 *One of the best features about this game was the selection of tracks —*

ROLAND IN TIME

AMSOFT
£8.95 cass

Like *Sorcery* this is another of the early hits for the Amstrad and it is the first game to contain Roland the intrepid one. Like so many of the other games of this time it was a platform game variant.

At each level you appear from a phone box and it is here you must return once you have completed that level or if you wish to skip to another one. Each level is a time zone and consequently varies quite a bit. Each level has its own set of nasties who are out to get you.

On first playing *Roland in Time* it turns out to be fun and very addictive but a few hours later interest starts to wane. While the graphics are good the sound is certainly not, though there is a nice version of the Dr Who signature tune. Overall *Roland in Time* is just another above average platform game that may or may not appeal to you.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 72%

BRIDGE

Kuma, £8.95, cass

This game actually allows a one player game of Bridge, should you have no partner then the computer will control the other three players. You play south and start the dealing for the first hand. If you end up playing dummy hand then you take over your partner's hand which means that you don't just have to sit and watch. Normal Bridge rules apply.

For players who haven't played Bridge before the game is very hard to get into but it does give you a chance to practise before you bother to play other human players. Graphics and sound aren't particularly wonderful but card game don't give a lot of scope for brilliant graphics. On the whole it's a reasonable card game that could prove fun to play.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 66%

THE PRIZE

AMSOFT
£8.95 cass

Looking very similar to the arcade game 'Berserk', *The Prize* sets you a mission to work your way through four blood-crazed, monster-filled mazes to the chamber of Midas where some ancient secret is held. To progress from one level to another you must collect the code pods that are scattered around the maze in numerical order and then proceed to the base that is marked B. Also scattered about the maze are other bases that give you energy and immunity from the monsters. To help you on your mission you are in control of a ship with a powerful laser cannon.

For fans of 'Berserk' games this is a reasonable but not brilliant conversion. The graphics are effective but leave a lot to be desired as does the sound. Initially, blasting aliens is fun but soon becomes tedious after a few games and there are better shoot em ups for the same price.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 48%

REDCOATS

Lothlorien, £6.95 cass

This game is set in the American War of Independence where you must fight against the blue coat Americans. There is a choice of five battles to fight or you have an option to create your own. The game is very similar to *Johnny Reb* but is a bit simpler to play. Each side controls four different types of unit which are used to try to defeat the enemy.

Redcoats isn't quite up to the standard of *Johnny Reb* but nevertheless it is an enjoyable game for a while even though it isn't to0 addictive. Once again this is another strategy game that is let down by poor graphics and terrible sound.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 25%

ANIMATED STRIP POKER

Knightsoft, £8.95 cass

In an attempt to rid Mindy of her garments (of which there aren't all that many to begin with) you have lured her to play a game of poker but she's some mean player. The game follows the standard rules of poker and you play for £150 per item of clothing.

Mindy can soon have you stripped if you aren't careful. Despite the title of the game the graphics are hardly likely to set you on fire and unless you are really interested in card games then it's doubtful whether you will enjoy this because it does become a bit tedious after you have beaten Mindy a couple of times — or she has beaten you.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 39%



AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

Hewson Consultants, £7.95 cass

A T C has several levels at which you can try and land aircraft as quickly and safely as possible. The display is of a radar screen showing positions of aircraft with their three letter codes and a runway approach path down which you must guide the planes. To do this you must instruct pilots in the courses the craft have to take and at what time they should descend and reduce speed.

It is unlikely that any other people besides fans of simulations will like this game because since it is quite technical, and by its nature, a bit slow — it's also hard! The graphics are simple looking, as you might expect and the sound is hardly brilliant, but if you are into this type of game then it could prove compelling and enjoyable.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 52%

BLAGGER

Alligata, £8.95 cass

Blagger was one of the earliest platform type games around. Born shortly after the classic *Manic Miner*, it is very much in the same vein.

You, the infamous thief Blagger, must work your way through 20 screens stealing as many goodies as you can. Each screen has a number of keys to be collected that are needed before you can approach the safe in that room and thus progress to the next level. The keys are not positioned in the most accessable places but it requires an amount of skill to get through the various screens. As well as being reasonably difficult there are a number of nasties to contend with which take the form of lethal bushes and other deadly animated objects.

Most platform games are quite addictive and *Blagger* is no exception to this rule. Both graphics and sound are of only average quality but they don't let the game down seriously. Sadly *Blagger* offers nothing new after *Manic Miner* but despite this it is likely to appeal to platform game fans.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 55%

WAR ZONE

CCS, £6.95 cass

Yet another wargame that is played over the traditional wargamers' map. You control an identical force to that of the computer and you must battle it out in the 'War Zone'. The terrain that your units are travelling over determines how many squares per move that they may advance, if any. Artillery units are naturally slow but the infantry can move quite fast and so surprise attacks may be mounted.

War Zone makes long tactical war games possible but these can soon become boring and drawn out especially as the computer takes so long over its moves. Graphics and sound let the game down tremendously so first impressions can write it off as useless. It is doubtful whether this will appeal to arcade games players but some wargamers should like it.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 43%

FRUITY FRANK

Kuma, £6.95 cass

Remember the arcade favourite of a couple of years back, *Dig Dug?* Well *Fruity Frank* is very similar to this game. Your job is to go around the screen collecting various types of fruit but this is made harder but the nasties that spring out of holes and mutate when hit by plums that drop from the top of the screen. Apples can be pushed on top of the nasties to kill them but you must be wary because they can also kill you. The other weapon at your disposal is a ball which bounces around the maze until it kills you.

Yet another simple game that proves very addictive. The graphics and sound are good but it is the fast action that keeps you coming back for more. *Fruity Frank* turns out to be one of the better arcade games for Amstrad and it is under the average Amstrad price.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 75%

straightforward and very well presented. Actually winning a race, on the other hand, turned out to be difficult. In fact, I didn't win a race after several hours play. Maybe I was just unlucky but I think the main reason for my poor result lay in the fact that once you crash, the game's over. It's a realistic feature which appeals to me but at the same time, it's one which does affect progress. Winning in this game would be much more rewarding than winning a rival game, I suspect. Because of some of the faults present, I doubt whether it would have ever seen the light of day, had it not been at the budget price. But for the pennies you pay, it's decent enough.

Presentation 67%
Lots of tracks to select from.

Graphics 53%
Reasonable representation of a high speed race circuit.

Sound 59%
Catchy little tune but the roaring engines lean more towards the squeaky side.

Playability 55%
Automatic mode makes things bearable but manual is near impossible.

Addictive qualities 59%
Patience will reward you with a reasonable game.

Value for money 73%
Very worthwhile.

Overall 65%
For the money, it's not bad at all.

SUPER SAM

Budgie, £2.99 cass

Why software companies insist on having several different labels is never quite clear but Budgie is Alligata's budget software arm and also the creators of *Super Sam* for the Amstrad. Boris, the town's green and slimy monster, has escaped from and broken his cage. It's no longer safe to walk the streets since Boris, according to the inlay picture, is a lunatic axe wielding psychopath. Well now Boris has holed himself up in a fortress and is doing his evil there, so Super Sam has been sent in to capture and cage Boris.

Scattered around the fortress you find parts of Boris' cage. These you need to collect before you can face the monster but also around the castle you discover various energy sapping entities. Run out of energy and it's one of your three lives lost. Other possible health hazards include the open manholes scattered about the place.

Sam lives in a pseudo perspective view world, a sort of mixture between 2 and 3D, with a wealth of scenery ranging from the battlements to the sewers of the fortress. Displayed with flick screen rooms, the program conforms to the pattern set by many before it. Each room may have several exits and some are hidden quite well. One portal to another room is cleverly hidden as the safe in a bank. Some rooms are of a deadly nature and one, hidden in the sewers, deep within the bowels of the castle, contains a bomb. Wander in here and it's game over, each of your men getting blown up as you reappear to continue your quest.

In some screens it's almost impossible to move without fatally losing energy, so around the fortress there are some purple syringes offering temporary invulnerability against the different demons and ghouls. Your time left for super man status is displayed as a countdown and until that reaches zero travelling through the baddies does you no harm at all.

As you collect the many pieces of cage, a replica is built up on the status screen so you know how far you've got. If you lose all your lives, either through falling down manholes or an encounter with Boris, a percentage score is displayed.

CRITICISM

1 **The graphics are horrendous. It fails to compete with the standard set by many Mastertronic games. And apart from terrible graphics, the gameplay is awkward due to**

difficult movement. Really, this was a terrible mistake. Software companies must learn that having a budget label is no excuse for producing awful games like this one. Nobody expects an absolutely astounding game to come out of this price bracket but reasonable games should not be impossible. There's plenty of talent out there, if only people like Budgie would make better use of it.

2 After seeing *Super Sam* on the Spectrum, I was convinced it was impossible to achieve anything lower on the Amstrad. I'm afraid I was wrong. Both moving and static graphics are abysmal. The colour choice is extremely unfortunate, bringing together colours previously seen next to each other only on test cards. The movement is appalling, flickery doesn't even come close to describe the stroboscopic nature of the sprite plotting routines. The game itself is an extremely poor attempt at a tried and tested genre. The idea is extremely simplistic though the overall task is difficult since you have to battle against extremely insensitive keyboard control. The only good thing I can see coming from this is for Budgie to learn from their mistake and pull their socks up in the future.

3 *Super Sam wasn't so much of a bad idea as a tragic one. There is nothing like enough game there to warrant its existence. Granted, this hasn't stopped other software houses from being as guilty as Budgie (and most of them wouldn't flinch at charging a tenner for the same program). Despite the embarrassing level of the game, I cannot condemn it totally as far worse has appeared for the Amstrad. Hopefully, the next title from Budgie will be better and they will start being good, healthy competition for Mastertronic. Such a state of affairs would be very good indeed for the end users of budget games.*

Presentation 41%
Very weak apart from the scrolling message.

Graphics 32%
Poor movement and poor statics.

Sound 51%
Pleasant tune but otherwise dull.

Playability 53%
Quite easy to get into but not much fun.

Addictive qualities 35%
The thrill of the challenge soon palls.

Value for money 48%
Overpriced for what's on offer.

Overall 47%
If you like a really good bargain, then this isn't for you.



WORLD SERIES BASEBALL



Imagine, £8.95 cass

Imagine, formerly one of the notorious names in the software industry, has made its debut on the Amstrad in the form of *World Series Baseball*, a simulation of that obscure American rounders rip off, baseball.

A simulation of one of America's most famous institutions, *World Series Baseball* attempts to bring all the spills, thrills and razzamataz of the real thing to the small screen. Taking place on a diamond shape field with a base at every corner, the rules are similar to those of rounders. The game is played over nine innings, an innings finishing once three men are out. If the batter misses three of your pitches, or is caught, he's out.

The field is viewed in true bird's eye style with the men as small blobs, while the close ups of important action are viewed on one of those massive projector screens fixed on the back of the stadium. The two teams take turns between pitching and batting. If you're pitching, then you also have control of the fielders. Before winding up for the pitch you can place the fielders either near the diamond or further from it. Press fire and the projector lights up the screen with a large view of the pitcher. Fire throws the ball and while it's in the air, you have slight control over how high the ball is when it reaches the striker. If he manages to hit your pitch, he makes a run for first base. You can move the fielder closest to the ball and once you get hold of it, it's possible to throw it to one of the basemen and try and get the striker out. Striking is controlled with the fire button, once you've hit, you control the player round the bases trying to avoid getting run out.

Every now and again, a lucky striker gets a home run, knocking the ball clean out of the stadium. Home Run flashes up on the stadium projector while all the players on the base run back to home base, collecting a point for every player back to the bench.

For your entertainment after the first and sixth innings a team of cheerleaders rush on field to give a quick dance accompanied by a little dittie played by the stadium band. The band also jumps into action for the title screen and any home runs scored.

CRITICISM

1 **After having had a few innings' experience on other versions of *World Series Baseball*, I was quite looking forward to the Amstrad version. The trouble is, Imagine have produced a product way below the Amstrad's capability. Inferior of the three versions in it's sheer unplayability, *World Series Baseball* battles against the human player's attempts to execute even the simplest of manoeuvres. The computer's team is manned with what seems to be near superhuman players, missing not even the trickiest of pitches. On average, the computer's striker is able to hit a home run every other go, but for the human player to even hit a ball is quite a feat. I'm afraid for the money, Imagine have come up with a real loser, not only is the gameplay terrible but the sound warbles away and the graphics flicker persistently. Definitely worth a miss.**

2 Let's face it, there aren't exactly a lot of baseball adaptations around for the Amstrad. Still, this can in no way be seen as a commendation for the game. The graphics do have their faults (though, to be fair, I've encountered much worse). But the main problem seems to be the way you lose every time you play the computer. I mean, you're not even in with a chance! You would have to play this game for an awfully long time before you could even hope to achieve victory and I don't think that's really fair. It leads to a very frustrating and unrewarding game. I, for one, have no patience with it.

3 *As an old fan of Imagine games on the Spectrum (and as a bit of a baseball nut), I had visions of this game being something really worthwhile. Unlike some other members of the team, I hadn't seen other versions of the game but after seeing this one, I'm not too sure that I want to. I've never felt at such a loss when trying to play a new game. The computer treats you as a really experienced player which nobody can hope to be when they first start paying. Maybe after a while you could compete with the computer on its own terms but you will have to ask yourself if such dedication to the game is likely to be rewarding. If you're like me than you will conclude that this is unlikely to be the case. Chunky, flickery graphics are not my idea of fun. There are some good features, like the massive TV screen at the back of the playing field. This is well synchronised with the rest of the game. Other than this, however, I feel that Imagine have made a bit of a mistake with this one.*

Presentation 56%
Cheap and very mediocre.

Graphics 43%
Fat and chunky with too few saving graces.

Sound 61%
Competent but uninspiring.

Playability 23%
Far too difficult.

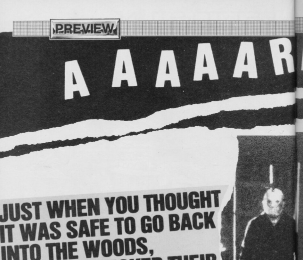
Addictive qualities 31%
Ultimately forgettable.

Value for money 38%
Nothing to justify the price.

Overall 45%
Too sloppy and too difficult to make a real impact.

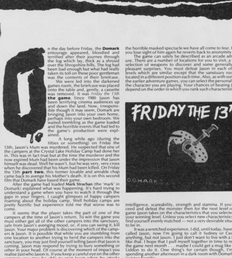

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A A A A A R



JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE TO GO BACK INTO THE WOODS, DOMARK CHECKED THEIR OFFICE CALENDAR AND REMEMBERED IT WAS FRIDAY. . . THE 13TH

RRGH!!!



On the day before Friday, the **Domark** entourage appeared, bloodied and terrified after their journey through the fog which lay, thick as a shroud over the Shropshire hills. The fog had been bad enough but what had really taken its toll on these poor gentleman was the contents of their briefcase.

We were led into the darkened games room, the briefcase was placed onto the table and, gently, a cassette was removed. It was *Friday the 13th* **the game**. Since 1980 Jason has been terrifying cinema audiences up and down the land. Now, irresponsible though it may seem, Domark are bringing Jason into your own home, perhaps into your own bedroom. We waited trembling as the game loaded and the horrible events that had led to the game's production were explained.

A long while ago (during the fifties or something) on Friday the 13th, Jason's Mum was murdered. He suspected that one of the campers at the Crystal Lake Holiday Camp had done her in. This was in fact true but at the time the murderer and the now expired Mum had been under the impression that Jason himself was dead. Well he wasn't, but he was very, very cross when he discovered that his Mum had been killed. On Friday the 13th **part two**, this former lovable and amiable chap came back to avenge his Mother's death. It is on this second film that Domark have based their game.

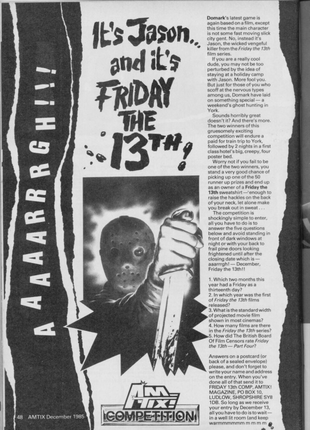
After the game had loaded **Mark Strachan** (the 'mark' in Domark) explained what was happening. It's hard trying to understand a game when you have to watch it through the gaps in your fingers. I caught glimpses of happy campers roaming about the holiday camp. Well holiday camps are pretty horrific but experience told me that worse was to come.

It seems that the player takes the part of one of the campers at the time of Jason's return. To win the game you must either get all of the other campers into the sanctuary, safe from Jason's avenging mood, or, if you can swing it, kill Jason. Your major problem is discovering which of the campers is Jason. It is possible that while you are stumbling from one location to another trying to herd the campers into the sanctuary, you may just find yourself telling Jason that Jason is coming. Jason may respond by trying to bury something or other in your head. Of course at the moment of impact you realise Just who Jason is. If you keep a careful eye on the other campers you may be able to spot Jason when he attacks someone else. The moment you spot him he transforms into the horrible masked spectacle we have all come to fear. But if you lose sight of him again he reverts back to anonymity.

The game can safely be described as an arcade adventure. There are a number of locations for you to visit, a wide selection of weapons to discover and some generally unpleasant surprises. You must defeat Jason in each of five levels which are similar except that the sanctuary room is located in a different position each time. Also, as with some of the earlier adventure games, you can select the personality of the character you are playing. Your chances of beating Jason depend on the order in which you rank such characteristics as intelligence, scareability, strength and stamina. If you succeed and defeat the monster then for the next level of the game Jason takes on the characteristics that you selected for your winning level. Unless you select new characteristics you find yourself evenly matched — not a very desirable situation to be in.

It was a wretched experience. I did, until today, have a cat called Jason, now I'm going to call it Sydney or Cecil or anything, but not Jason. I just don't want to live with a fiend like that. I hope that I pull myself together in time to review the game next month . . . maybe I could get a mug like Gary Liddon to do it. One thing's for certain though, I'm not spending another afternoon in a dark room with Domark, it's just too horrific.

JEREMY *(Who's afraid of the dark)* **SPENCER**



Domark's latest game is again based on a film, except this time the main character is not some fast moving slick city gent. No, instead it's Jason, the wicked vengeful killer from the *Friday the 13th* film series.

If you are a really cool dude, you may not be too perturbed by the idea of staying at a holiday camp with Jason. More fool you. But just for those of you who scoff at the nervous types among us, Domark have laid on something special — a weekend's ghost hunting in York.

Sounds horribly great doesn't it? And there's more. The two winners of this gruesomely exciting competition will endure a paid for train trip to York, followed by 2 nights in a first class hotel's big, creepy, four poster bed.

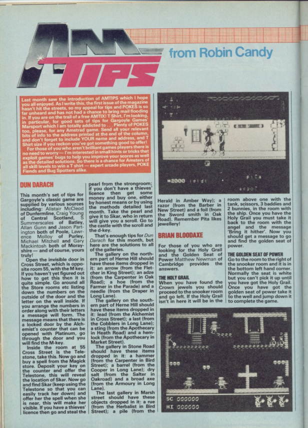
Worry not if you fail to be one of the two winners, you stand a very good chance of picking up one of the 50 runner up prizes and end up as an owner of a **Friday the 13th** sweatshirt —'enough to raise the hackles on the back of your neck, let alone make you break out in sweat . . .

The competition is shockingly simple to enter, all you have to do is to answer the five questions below and avoid standing in front of dark windows at night or with your back to frail pine doors looking frightened until after the closing date which is — aaarrrgh! — December, Friday the 13th!!

1. Which two months this year had a Friday as a thirteenth day?
2. In which year was the first of *Friday the 13th* films released?
3. What is the standard width of projected movie film shown in most cinemas?
4. How many films are there in the *Friday the 13th* series?
5. How did The British Board Of Film Censors rate *Friday the 13th — Part Four*?

Answers on a postcard (or back of a sealed envelope) please, and don't forget to write your name and address on the entry. When you've done all of that send it to FRIDAY 13th COMP, AMTIX! MAGAZINE, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB. So long as we receive your entry by December 13, all you have to do is to wait— in a well lit room (and keep warmmmmmmm m m m m


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AMTIPS

from Robin Candy

Last month saw the introduction of AMTIPS which I hope you all enjoyed. As I write this, the first issue of the magazine hasn't hit the streets, so my appeal for tips and POKES is so far unheard and has not had a chance to bring mail flooding in. If you are on the trail of a free AMTIX! T Shirt, I'm looking, in particular, for good sets of tips for Gargoyle Games' Marsport which I am totally addicted to . . . Plenty of POKES too, please, for any Amstrad game. Send all your relevant bits of info to the address printed at the end of the column, and don't forget to include YOUR name and address, and T Shirt size if you reckon you've got something good to offer!

For those of you who aren't brilliant games players there is no need to worry — I'm interested in small hints or tricks that exploit games' bugs to help you improve your scores as well as the detailed solutions. So there is a chance for Amsters of all skill levels to win a T shirt — expert arcade players, POKE Fiends and Bug Spotters alike.

DUN DARACH

This month's set of tips for Gargoyle's classic game are supplied by various sources including: Alistair McCleod of Dunfermline, Craig Young of Central Scotland, S Summerscales of Batley, Allan Gunn and Jason Partington both of Poole, Lawrence Molloy of Purley, Michael Mitchell and Gary Mackintosh both of Morayshire — and of course, yours truly!

Open the invisible door in Cross Street, which is opposite room 55, with the M key. If you haven't yet figured out how to get this then it is quite simple. Go around all the Store rooms etc listing down the numbers on the outside of the door and the letter on the wall inside. If you arrange the numbers in order along with their letters a message will form. The message means that there is a locked door by the Alchemist's counter that can be opened with Platinum, go through the door and you will find the M-key.

Inside the room at 55 Cross Street is the Telestone, take this. Now go and buy a spell from the Magick store. Deposit your key on the counter and offer the Telestone, this will reveal the location of Skar. Now go and find Skar (keep using the Telestone so that you can easily track her down) and offer her the spell when she is near, this will make her visible. If you have a thieves' licence then go and steal the pearl from the strongroom; if you don't have a thieves' licence then get some money and buy one, either by honest means or by using the methods detailed last month. Take the pearl and give it to Skar, who in return will give you a scroll. Go to the castle with the scroll and the d-key.

That's enough tips for *Dun Darach* for this month, but here are the solutions to all of the galleries.

The gallery on the northern part of Herne Hill should have these items dropped in it: an arrow (from the Fletcher in King Street); an adze (from the Carpenter in Oak Road); a hoe (from the Farmer in the Parade) and a needle (from the Draper in Long Lane).

The gallery on the southern part of Herne Hill should have these items dropped in it: lead (from the Alchemist in Cross Street); a last (from the Cobblers in Long Lane); a sting (from the Apothecary in Heath Road) and a hemlock (from the Apothecary in Market Street).

The gallery in Stone Road should have these items dropped in it: a hammer (from the Carpenter in Bird Street); a barrel (from the Cooper in Long Lane); dry salt (from the Salter in Oakroad) and a broad axe (from the Armoury in Long Lane).

The last gallery in Marsh street should have these objects dropped in it: a rue (from the Herbalist in Bird Street); a pile (from the Herald in Amber Way); a razor (from the Barber in New Street) and a foil (from the Sword smith in Oak Road). Remember Pita likes jewellery!

BRIAN BLOODAXE

For those of you who are looking for the Holy Grail and the Golden Seat of Power Matthew Newman of Cambridge provides the answers.

THE HOLY GRAIL

When you have found the Crown jewels you should proceed to the snooker room and go left. If the Holy Grail isn't in here it will be in the room above one with the tank, scissors, 3 baddies and 2 bunnies, in the room with the ship. Once you have the Holy Grail you must take it back to the room with the angel and the message 'Bring it hither'. Now you should get a message to go and find the golden seat of power.

THE GOLDEN SEAT OF POWER

Go to the room to the right of the snooker room and it is in the bottom left hand corner. Normally the seat is white but you can't pick it up until you have got the Holy Grail. Once you have got the golden seat of power take it to the well and jump down it to complete the game.

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

I'm a big fan of this game — here are just a few of my findings.

Farflame the Dragonlord, Fawkrin the Skulkrin and Lake Mirrow can all destroy the Ice crown (this is in the tower near Ushgarak and it can only be collected by Morkin). If the ice fear gets very strong then get Morkin to take the crown as far away from your armies as possible. This will lessen the fear and improve your soldiers' fighting potential. At the beginning of the game send Rorthron NE to recruit the Lord of Blood and then SE to the Citadel of Shimeral. Send Morkin north on his quest and Luxor SE to recruit Brith. Then guide him to the Citadel of Shimeral. Send Corleth the Fey east to Shimeral then NE to recruit Thimrath the Fey in the woods. Group all your men (except Morkin who should continue Northwards) at Shimeral then split them into two groups. Send one SE to recruit other lords and head towards Xajorkith. Once they have recruited Dawn it is best for him to head N to recruit other lords such as Kumar. This will make a third group who can either be kept up north to defend a citadel or they can be taken down south to help the other forces. Send the other group with Luxor SW to recruit Gard. Then go south. Move east recruiting Fey and other minor lords until you end up at Xajorkith. Here you should regroup your men. Now choose: either to head north to fight Doomdark or to fight it out down South. Remember Doomdark has 250,000 troops, and the more places he takes the stronger the ice fear will become . . . but this will spread his forces over a much wider area allowing you to plan raids and gradually take all the areas Doomdark occupies back.

WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

Steve Taylor of Frampton West and Ben Stoneof AMTIX! Towers give the lowdown on how to thrash your opponent in Melbourne House's classic martial arts program. Just follow this guide and you will soon be at the 10th Dan

To make progress you must first of all become familiar with all the moves and how to execute them — this is best done in the two player mode. It shouldn't take long before you are competent at this. The roundhouse and flying kick are fancy moves but not very practical. On the Novice and 1st Dan levels you may get away with performing them but later the computer opponent becomes too clever to fall for them.

By far the best move to perform is the forward or backward sweep but if it is mistimed, the computer will get you with a jab kick. A good tactic is to move towards your opponent and then do a forward somersault over his head and quickly perform a backward sweep. Should he be just out of range then do a half roundhouse and run after him then kick him in the back. It may not be cricket but it is effective.

From the 1st Dan walk forward so that you are near enough to perform a high kick then do it and the computer player will block the kick. While he is doing this do a middle or jab kick and you will knock him over. This works up to the 5th dan. On the higher levels it is best to play safe and just get in front on points then avoid the computer player until the time runs out. This may not gain points but it does move you up levels.

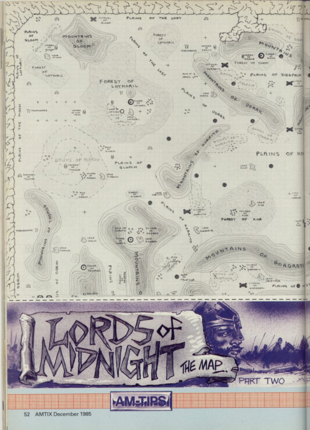
DRAGONTORC

Continuing on from last month's tips here are a couple more if you are still stumped. Thanks go to Andrew Hewson for his generosity.

Presuming that you have got out of the Vaults of Locris and are now in Weirdhenge; use the Leyrod spell to reveal leycubes in the henge. These cubes take you to different locations in the game. Follow the route of the yellow cube: this should take you to the area of the blasted forest. Now use the leyrod in the henge of this area and again take the route via the yellow cube which will take you to Webwood. Make sure you have got Merlyn's seal when in this area. Hopefully everyone's now in Webwood. First of all find the stick — should a spider bite you then it is possible to stop the energy drain by using the heal spell (found in the Vaults of Locris). Move the stone with the stick and take the axe which lies beneath. Use Merlyn's seal to move the flagstone, go down the hole. You should now be in Merlyn's cave. Read the message that is in a chest, which can be unlocked using Merlyn's seal. Leave the message scroll and the half moon (this was obtained from Locris). Use the servant on the table in the adjacent room and take the milk and the Warrior gem. Go down the exit and axe the stump. Find a log and put the milk near it to reveal a hedgehog, take this. Go back to the axed stump and use the hedgehog on it to reveal a key. With the key and Merlyn's seal go back down into Merlyn's cave and unlock the locked door with the key. Open the chest inside that room with Merlyn's seal to find Halgor's seal. Take this and the halfmoon and proceed to Halgor's sanctuary.

FANTASTIC VOYAGE

Still having trouble with this game? Thanks to Dave Williams of Moreton most of your problems should now be solved. Information supplied by Dave details the locations of the parts of the submarine. Also the parts


PLAINS OF THE LOST
PLAINS OF GLOOM
MOUNTAINS OF GLOOM
FOREST OF LOTHORIL
FOREST OF LOTHORIL
PLAINS OF THE LOST
PLAINS OF DESPAIR
MOUNTAINS OF UGRAK
PLAINS OF UGRAK
PLAINS OF THE MOON
DOWNS OF MIRROW
PLAINS OF GLORIM
MOUNTAINS OF KORKITH
FOREST OF KOR
PLAINS OF KORKITH
MOUNTAINS OF GORGRATH
LORDS OF MIDNIGHT
THE MAP
PART TWO
AM-TIPS



PLAINS OF RATHORN
PLAINS OF LOGRIM
PLAINS OF FADRAGH
DOWNS OF LOGRIM
DEATH
PLAINS OF ITHIRIL
MOUNTAINS OF DROGN
DOWNS OF UGRORN
FOREST OF DREAMS
PLAINS OF ITHIRIL
FOREST OF WHISPERS
PLAINS OF HERATH
ITHIRIL
MOUNTAINS OF KUMAR

STARION

This next installment of tips for Melbourne House's Acco-lade should help you complete Block 1 (the rest of the time grids are in AMTIX! Issue 1). Next month there should be another load of time grids, all thanks to Tim Dawson of Farnham Common.

BLOCK 1 GRID 6
AD 0079: VESUVIUS— She blows her top over Pompeii
BC 0064: NERO— He fiddles while Rome burns
AD 1897: ELECTRON— JJ Thompson's single charge
AD 1869: TABLE— Rest for Mendeleyev's periods
AD 1867: ALASKA— America's bargain from Russia
AD 1944: D— Big Day in Normandy
AD 1999: ECLIPSE— Momentary darkness, just, in Cornwall
AD 1871: RIBBONS— FA cup is undressed
AD 1945: URANIUM— Ingredient of the atom bomb
GRID PASSWORD: ADVENTURE

BLOCK 1 GRID 7
AD 1773: TEA— Getting thirsty at Boston party
AD 1867: NOBEL— Dynamite without ring
AD 1756: CALCUTTA— This black hole is in India
AD 1851: EXHIBIT— Show off great crystals at the palace
AD 1812: CANNON— Overture noise makers
AD 1922: INSULIN— Pancreas gives a hope for diabetics
BC 0163: ROSETTA— Hieroglyphic stone for Ptolemy V
AD 1997: CHINA— Hong Kong takes the slow boat
AD 1042: EDWARD— He confesses to being crowned
GRID PASSWORD: ECCENTRIC

BLOCK 1 GRID 8
AD 1796: NEEDLE— Jenner's cowpox pricker
AD 1912: ICEBERG— Titanic needs a target
AD 1969: EAGLE— Big bird gives a giant leap for mankind
AD 1929: CRASH— Black Tuesday in Wall street
AD 1066: ARROW— One in the eye for Harold
AD 1953: ORB— The Queen shall have a ball
BC 0543: TRIANGLE— Pythagorus has some squares
AD 1492: BAHAMAS— To them he sails the Ocean blue
AD 0004: MANGER— What a messiah — no crib for a bed
GRID PASSWORD: COMBINATE

BLOCK 1 GRID 9
AD 1911: POLE— Amundsen's southern flag holder
BC 0044: IDES— Caesar beware the fifteenth of March
AD 1805: NELSON— A hardy man dies at Trafalgar
AD 1969: BOOM— Concorde goes supersonic
AD 1900: HYDROGEN— Zepplin's gas
AD 1454: INK— Guttenburg's Bible is too faint
AD 1837: MORSE— Dashed clever telegraph man
AD 1914: ARCHDUKE— Ferdinand shot dead without his title
AD 1682: APPLE— Newton sees the fruits of gravity
GRID PASSWORD: AMPHIBIAN

BLOCK PASSWORD: AERO SPACE

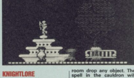
must be collected in this order.
1st Mouth
2nd Intestine (look around carefully)
3rd Liver
4th Gall Bladder
5th Pancreas
6th Duodenal
7th Stomach (look around carefully)
8th Colon (hard to find)
If you are having problems destroying the growths etc, then the white cells can do the job for you.

EVERYONE'S A WALLY

Following on from last month's tips for this game here are a few more hints to help you get one of the letters. Next month I will reveal how to get a few more letters and get nearer to completing the game. All this information was thanks to David Yardley of Lichfield.

To get the letter E you have to mend the hook and stamp the parcel. To mend the hook you have to be Wally, get the super glue and the broken hook and take them to the workshed. Put the hook on top of the bench and walk under the vice with the super glue then, take the hook which should now say 'hook working'. Take the hook to the crane. Now change to Wilma and get the parcel and stamp, go to the post office and walk to the far end of the post office, the parcel should now be stamped. You can now go and exchange the stamped parcel for the letter E.

To mend the gas pipe you must be Dick and have the gas mask. Go to the cave and collect the leaking Gas pipe (beware of the shark thingy, who will sap your energy). When you are out of the cave go and find the chewing gum, put the the pipe on top of the bench in the work shed and go and find the patch. With the patch and the chewing gum walk under the bench with the leaking pipe on it, collect the pipe, it should now be patched. With the pipe and the gas mask go back into the cave and replace the pipe. This gets rid of the sparkles in the cave and the flame from the motorway.



KNIGHTLORE

There aren't many hints that you can give away for this one but David Moritz of Harrow has come up with this little hint to help us all.

When in the Wizard's room drop any object. The spell in the cauldron will never come out of the cauldron as long as an object is on the floor. This means you can walk around the Wizard's room whenever you wish even if you are a Werewolf.

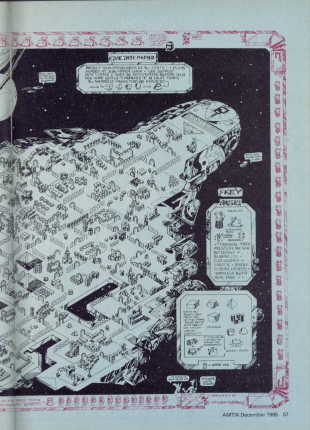
ROCCO

Just a quick tip for Gremlin Graphics' boxing simulation thanks to Mark Towner of Stoke-on-Trent
On the first two boxers just keep punching and you will beat them. On the third and fourth boxers watch which hand the boxer taps and guard that side. Now wait until his arm drops to punch you, then punch him. Using this method it is possible to win the world champion ships quite easily.

It looks as if I've filled up my allotted space for this month but next month there should be more tips on Dragontorc, Dun Darach and a few on Gargoyle's Marsport. If you've got any tricks, hints or pokes then please send them to the address below. I'm off to play Marsport now......

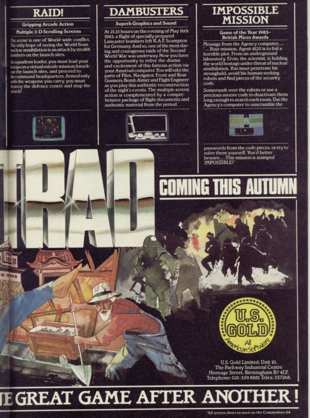
ROBIN CANDY, AMTIPS, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE, SY8 1DB


IT'S HARD BEING CUTE AND NASTY!
THE MAP


WIF?
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INTO
KEY
NASTIES
MOUSELEK
CLOCKWORK ALIEN
TRACKER
TRACKERS - TRACK MOUSELEKS ARE SLOW BUT DEADLY — BEWARE ! ! ! CLOCKWORKS — ERRATIC + DEADLY PLASMIC USHERS — HARMLESS BUT A REAL PAIN
STAYS PUT MOSTLY. BUT MIGHT GO UP AND DOWN. CAUSE YOU TO SLIPE ABOUT OR IT MIGHT VANISH COMPLETELY
MOVABLE
MINES CAN BE CLEARED BY USING THE ROBODROID
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BOUNTY BOB STRIKES BACK!
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"Bounty Bob Strikes Back" is the sequel to "Miner 2049er" which was a huge success on the Commodore 64 and Atari machines. Now on the Amstrad, this version features Bob's toughest challenge to date and he needs your help more than ever before to guide him through the mine. The mutant organisms within have multiplied and over run the mine entirely, making it extremely difficult to survive the hazards of the underground passageways. Using high powered special equipment in the twenty-five caverns is Bob's only hope of achieving his objective of securing the mine and defeating the evil plans of Yukon Yohan.
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*All screen shots as seen on the Commodore 64





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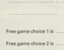
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ADVENTURE

THE GUARANTEED ETERNAL SANCTUARY MAN

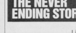
Despite rumours of my demise beneath the shoe of Big J, I've returned with more space (as promised). There's a full review of *Graphic Adventure Creator*, glimpsed at briefly, last month. I also have a close look at *Genesis* from CRL, another adventure creation utility. And of course, there are a few adventures to deal with. As usual, space is limited, and so details of 8TH Day software are, I'm afraid, going to have to wait until next month.

Could it be that sitting here, staring at a mostly blank monitor screen, I'm suffering from withdrawal symptoms? I've always enjoyed adventure gaming but never have I considered myself addicted . . . Mmm, a possibility no doubt. All this hard working for an unsympathetic Big J. What will become of me? There probably won't be any headlines in the daily press when I'm washed out. Not that I don't deserve the coverage — I'm the lovable type, all said and done. But Big J, has connections in high places, make no mistake. He could have the whole thing hushed up. Remember Watergate? Nothing but the work of sloppy amateurs compared to the stuff Jem does.

Eventually they'll probably have a robot doing my job. I'll be worn out — left on the proverbial scrap heap (or is it a compost heap for leprechauns). There's nothing I can do about it either. Have any of you got any idea exactly how much damage I could do to Big J's foot when the day of judgement comes and he stands on me? None at all is the answer, I suspect you're looking for. You can help. Write to me and make me feel popular — write to me and make me feel unpopular — just get the Big J off my back (not literally)! PRESERVE YOUR LOCAL LEPRECHAUN!

I'll admit to anything if it keeps me alive, even being a leprechaun. Ah, it appears that I've taken up the entire introductory area with this plea. What a change to come out with nothing constructive whatsoever!

Enjoy the column . . .



THE NEVER ENDING STORY

Ocean, £9.95 cass

Though not exactly reknowned for adventure games, Ocean have dived in at the deep end and produced a licensed version of *Never Ending Story* from the film of the same name, in a twin cassette pack and utilising both a heavily redefined character set and full colour graphics. Well, what you get for your money looks good, if nothing else. . . .

To the plot then. You play a young boy with an alter ego Atreyu from a fantasy land accessible by reading a certain book (guess what it's called). In this land, the young Atreyu is supposed to be one of the greatest living warriors. Well, the tests of tests is here to find out if that's the case because something called the Nothing is swallowing the land faster than Jeremy can eat everybody else's lunch, and it shows no sign of getting indigestion. Your task is to find out what the Nothing is and stop it.

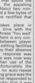




As you may suspect, this is no easy task and several characters and creatures will have to help you if you are to have any chance of success. Your powerful horse, Artax, can be found and there is a way to call a more powerful ally in the form of Falkor, the Luck Dragon. These are just two of the characters you will meet on your quest. The game has a lot more in it than the original film, including your homelands and the Silver Mountains.

On loading, you're greeted with a none too unpleasant version of the theme tune from the film. However, the moment the little ditty is over, you are told to load in the first of three data blocks. Like I said, there's a lot more in this adventure than in the film. The second part of the loading process soon ends and you are launched into the game proper. At the bottom of the screen is the input area and above it is the the usual descriptive passage. However, the most interesting point on the presentation front, was that the graphics window (which contained beautifully drawn backgrounds graphics) contained another window which constantly changed to reveal the main character of any given scene. If this wasn't pleasantly original enough, every time you collected an object, it to would be displayed in its own little window.

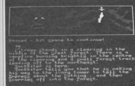
All the graphics were not only colourful, but superbly drawn. There's no doubt that Ocean took the presentation side of the game very seriously indeed. On the subject of presentation, the character set is pretty incredible as well. Easily read, it has atmosphere and a Roger Dean like style, somehow reminiscent of early Yes albums. Rather unfortunately, there is the occasional clash of poorly designed capital letters, but the overall effect is very striking and impressive. The one thing that spoils the presentation is the appalling text scrolling. About two minutes thought and a few bytes of code could have rectified that problem.



The game takes place in pseudo — real time with the result that the phrase 'You wait' appears when there is any considerable gap between player input. The input editing facilities are noticeable by their absence also. Keyboard response was dodgy and there was now way to edit other than use of the delete key. Unfortunately the delete key had no auto-repeat either. One saving grace was the fact that the game responded to an input so quickly that it was really not too bad if mistakes were made because a corrected version could soon be typed in.

It was not too surprising to find that the interpreter handled player input quickly as it had an abysmally small vocabulary. It didn't understand the word 'examine' or 'help' (which most adventures at least have a smart remark for) or indeed many others. Simple, two word input was the order of the day, and it appears that the word handling system looked no further than the last word it couldn't under-

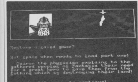




stand. This led to a variety of difficulties but I don't know for sure, whether these had anything to do with the fact that the game told me that I wasn't carrying a burning branch in one move, before telling me that it was part of my inventory! All things considered, this game won't remembered as a classic in terms of interaction.

Still, I couldn't help being impressed with the overall look and feel of the adventure and wanted to go on. On the whole, I suppose it isn't that bad, it's just that it looks so good, you expect more. I would rate the graphics themselves as a little below Adventure Inernational quality (though the way they are used is very good). Interaction is even further below the standards set by AI. Not a bad first effort and if you liked the film (my girlfriend dragged me to see it, honest) then you will probably find it worthwhile. One thing's for sure. The plot isn't all that easy to solve and there's plenty of it, too.

Atmosphere 79%
Plot 84%
Interaction 52%
Lastability 81%
Value for money 83%
Overall 79%



LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

Beyond, £9.95 cass, £13.95 disk
Author: Mike Singleton





After a long wait, Beyond have finally released their epic adventure/strategy game, *Lords of Midnight*. The plot is a highly complex one involving four controllable characters, a plethora of armies and a Tolkienesque collection of baddies.

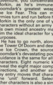
Your main character is Luxor. He is the Moonprince and master of all the good forces in the Land of Midnight. The game begins with Luxor set to face his greatest challenge, as the master of all that is evil, Doomdark, tries to control the land. Luxor controls three other major characters, Rorthron, Corleth and his own son Morkin. You can select any of these characters at any time in the game and play it from their point of view. The format of the game allows everything to be achieved by single key input, so only the sheer scope proves confusing to the beginner. Actually getting anywhere with a character is easy.

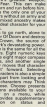
The plot and its history are so convoluted that half of the instruction booklet takes the form of a fantasy story leading up to the present circumstances. To explain it all here would be impossible. But you can treat the game as a series of mini-games and that is the best way to explain the goings on. To play the adventure, you concentrate on Morkin, as he's immune to Doomdark's greatest weapon, the Ice Fear. This can make armies turn and run before him. Morkin is the only one of your characters without an army and his own mixed ancestry makes him the ideal character for your purposes.

He has to go north, alone to the Tower Of Doom and destroy the Ice Crown, the source of Doomdark's devastating power. Guidance is the same for all the characters. Eight numeric keys reveal the eight major compass directions, and another single key entry moves that character one 'unit' forward. Selecting other characters is also a simple action. Apart from looking and moving, characters may Think and Choose. Choose presents the options available to your character on a menu, while Think provides supplementary information on status and position.

The main reason for Think is because the normal screen shows a graphic view and some text. The result usually is that there is little room to supply all the information you may require on a single screen. For those of you still unaware of all the fuss surrounding this game's earlier incarnations, the program's graphics aren't designed to be high-res. But there are thirty two thousand possible views.

Back to the plot. The strategy side of *LOM* involves you building up your forces with the other three characters and seizing the Citadel of Ushgarak, where Doomdark commands his forces. Luxor is very useful as













the commander here because he wears the Moon Ring which protects any forces near him to a certain degree. If Luxor snuffs it, Morkin will have to find the ring in order for you to regain control of the other characters and forces in the game.

Game time passes continually through night and day and there is a great advantage in achieving your aims as quickly as possible. Forces may become harder to control through demoralisation, if the fighting goes on too long. Doomdark will win if he eliminates Morkin (for while the son of Luxor lives, there may still be a hope for the Free — if you get my point) and crush the Citadel of Xajorkith (it's hard enough to spell, let alone conquer). He will pursue his aims relentlessly. He fights well also, so it's a good thing Beyond have put in a Save game option.

Graphics aren't anything special compared to other adventure games, but then there's so much choice. Personally, I find them worthwhile, considering the variety of game play. The redefined character set is beautiful and adds a lot to the visual impact. The whole project was very well thought out from the beginning. Considering the whole thing is on a single cassette, it really is an epic. No time is wasted trying to figure out commands because of the single key input and the presentation and background are both remarkable in their depth. More conservative players may find them a little pretentious but that can hardly be considered a major factor.

Lords of Midnight was a classic on other machines and I'm glad to say that the Amstrad version lives up to all my expectations.

Atmosphere 91%
Plot 95%
Interaction 92%
Lastability 93%
Value for money 90%
Overall 93%

GRAPHIC ADVENTURE CREATOR

Incentive Software,
£22.95 cass, £24.95 disk
Author: Sean Ellis

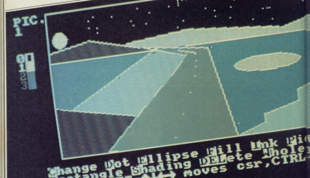
It seems that trying to get a finished copy of this utility for review, is rather like trying to get hold of a finished Atari ST. Last month, the copy I saw was far from finished, but Incentive soon had another copy winging its wonderful way to me. This was supposed to be complete apart from one or two aesthetic qualities. There was only a rough manual and no packaging so presentation has to be considered purely in terms of the program itself.

GRAPHICS

Once loaded, you are presented with the obligatory main menu, from whence all things come. The first department to look at is the graphics creator. This section has a menu of its own, beneath the graphics area. Drawing is achieved with the cursor keys (there is no joystick option). In last month's preview of the game, I mistakenly suggested that the program utilised the high-res mode but this is not the case. Medium resolution four colour mode is the default setting for the graphics section and there is no way this can be altered.

Rectangles and elipses can be made with simple commands and can be as large as the graphics area itself, though they need not be held fully within the display area. The result is that smooth curves and blocked areas can be achieved on screen fairly easily. As you draw, the computer remembers each step. This allows you to scan through the various stages of your masterpiece. All these stages can fill the computer's memory (available for that picture) quite quickly so it is important to remove redundant stages of the drawing with the delete key or, an even more economic method, merge the picture into a new empty frame. This only uses three bytes! Given time, the pictures may be as complex as you require.

When you have finished the actual drawing, it will probably be necessary to colour areas of the screen. To do this you select the fill option. Although Incentive had a proper fill command, it was decided that this took too much memory and time to initiate. Therefore the finished version has a slightly more primitive fill and as a result, the option may be needed more



than once to fill some areas. This doesn't affect the final picture and, in fact, allows it to be drawn more quickly.

You can actually have ten colours on the screen at once by clever use of shading. If the shade command is selected before fill, you are asked to supply two colours. Then, when you press enter, a fine hatch-work of the two colours will fill that area. Incidentally, when you are selecting inks, you are also asked for two colours. If you want a solid ink, you ask for the same colour twice. If you input two different colours, the ink will flash between the two. This can give some astounding effects if used properly.

While *GAC* is running, there can only be up to 25K free memory so it is a good idea to save each picture as you draw it. You can have up to ten thousand locations though this would doubtless require extensive disk access if you were to fill each one properly. It's surprisingly easy to use this part of the utility. The freedom of modification allows the most inept artists (such as myself) to turn out reasonable pictures in a relatively short amount of time.

VOCABULARY

No matter how pretty your adventure looks, you're not going to go very far without a vocabulary. This is the most crucial part of any adventure system. More often than not, it's also the most badly handled department. Without doubt though, this is the strongest part of *GAC*.

Most interpreters handle verb /noun, two word input. Vocabularies may be large but only the first four letters of any word are understood and word order must be precise. Some are more advanced and may locate key words in a sentence. So long as the actual command within the sentence complies with the limitations above, it is understood. *GAC* is very different. Vocabulary is split into three distinct areas; Nouns, Verbs and Adverbs. Each of these divisions can have up to 255 words, allowing for quite a substantial vocabulary. The Adverbs section is an excellent addition to the standard combinations. It is actually rather arbitrarily labelled as you can use prepositions as well. If you want the word **it** to be recognised as part of a command, simply label 'it' as noun 255. That way, the interpreter will assume the word refers to the last object mentioned.

As usual you can have synonyms (as each word has to have a numeric value placed with it, two words with the same number will be considered to have the same meaning). Words are stored in alphabetical, rather than numerical order. This means that whilst synonyms become separated, actually scanning the tables for particular words becomes far easier. Consequently, editing speeds up dramatically. Words are no longer restricted to the 'four letter' syndrome. You can make them as long or short as you like and the interpreter handles them admirably.

This interpreter is also responsible for some pretty remarkable word handling. Full sentence, multi-command actions are handled with no problem at all. **And, Then** and punctuation can separate different actions with no upper limit to the number of actions given in a single input. When I was playing a sample adventure, *Ransom*, the first action was always 'Get the lamp, light it then go west.' Far more complex commands could be implemented if necessary.

LOCATION DESCRIPTIONS

As I mentioned earlier, there can be up to ten thousand of these (theoretically, at least). The reason for this is that a later version of *GAC* will have the option to utilise extra memory from expansion units or the CPC6128 and have disk access capabilities. Any adventure written on this version of the system will be compatible with the later versions.

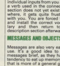
Room 0 is not available for use. The reason for this is that it exists as a kind of limbo for destroyed objects or those yet to be created. Otherwise you simply input the number of the room you wish to edit and write as much as you want (descriptions too large for the bottom part of the screen can be made to scroll without difficulty). When you construct a location description, you find words split over the edge of the screen. Don't bother trying to tidy it up though, as formatting is done automatically when you run the finished adventure.

After writing the description you have to explain the connections to other rooms. Because of the way this is handled, be



GRAPHIC ADVENTURE CREATOR

sure that all the verbs and abbreviations used in movement are already in the correct place. The computer analyses individual inputs from you and if a verb used in the connections section does not yet exist elsewhere, it gets quite frustrated with you. You are forced to go and install the correct vocabulary and then return to the description section afterwards.



MESSAGES AND OBJECTS

Messages are also very easy to use. It's a good idea to keep messages brief, as they have a tendency to eat up memory, but that is more of a general guideline than something peculiar to this program. After selecting this section from the main menu, you simply input the message number required and proceed to edit or create it. As usual with these utilities, there are 255 messages. Some default messages are sent as a file with the program. These take up the 'top end' of the message section so they are out of your way. You are still free to modify them or leave them out if you wish. The message presentation section follows the same procedure as other editing sections in*GAC* so there should be no difficulty in handling it once you get this far.

Objects have starting locations, descriptions and weight. Weights may be added to increase authenticity in the game. This is achieved by setting values, associated with the relevant object, to be added to a counter possessed by your character. The result is, the computer keeps a constant check on how much the character is carrying and how much more he can cope with. The latter value may also be made a variable by setting another counter up to keep track of current strength, itself affected by the various actions the character undertakes during the course of the adventure. This way, carrying a lot of items doesn't necessarily result in an encumbered character.

Other adventure writing facilities offer this kind of detail but *GAC* has everything laid out so that the options available to the designer are always clearly displayed. Again, there may be up to 255 objects.

CONDITIONS

Any utility of this nature needs some way to set conditions. These are the things which determine whether or not you can see, breathe and a variety of more subtle details. *GAC* uses three kinds of conditions, High priority, Low priority and Local. Local conditions deal with peculiarities encountered in particular locations requiring the resetting of flags or counters. They deal with whether important objects (and their effects) are in the vicinity. High priority conditions are those which the adventurer can do nothing about. If you walk into a vacuum without a spacesuit, you're dead. No choice about that.

Low priority conditions are usually those affected by the player's input. If you're sensible enough to wear a spacesuit before you venture into cold vacuum, a low priority condition would set a flag to tell the adventure not to kill you while you were in vacuum. The local conditions determine whether the spacesuit exists or not. Simple.

There are 256 markers (flags), numbered 0 to 255. This in itself makes *GAC* nearly ten times more powerful in 'notekeeping' terms than any other utility on the market but that isn't all. There are another 128 counters, numbered from 0 to 127. Whereas in *The Quill*, complex combinations of conditions could only be set with extremely convoluted use of flags, you now have more than your average adventure designer would know what to do with!

A good deal of simple logic and clever system vocabulary makes setting up the conditions (normally the most complex part of any adventure writing system) a doddle. Like other systems, it's rather like working in compiled code but *GAC* uses a rather more sophisticated 'language' with the result that somebody with only the most vague ideas about how to write such details would pick up the method very quickly.

CONCLUSION

GAC is not perfect. There are occasions when you wish to return to the main menu when BREAK appears briefly on the screen. The manual I had attempted to be friendly, but it in no way explained the full potential of the system. In some areas it was hopelessly misleading. Even so, there are another three weeks before the release date and Incentive have assured me that everything will be cleared up before then. As far as they are concerned, after a year in development, they would rather be a little late and have a near perfect product than rush at the last minute and suffer a variety of annoying bugs.

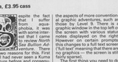
Unfortunately, though the current version is compatible with all models, disk or tape, there is no way to check how efficient the bank switching or disk access routines are because they will not appear until later. When 'MkII' comes out, I'll let you know.

All in all *Graphic Adventure Creator* is the most astounding program I've ever encountered on an eight bit machine. Whilst not everybody wants to write adventures, those who do will find there is no better value for money product on the market. The neat simplicity and power of the commands coupled with the tiny 17K the program takes up, puts it far ahead of any competitor. I can't wait for the next version to arrive. The use of extensive disk access with massive vocabulary, syntax and graphics power provided are likely to leave me short of a lot sleep. Isn't that what adventuring is all about?

As far as *GAC* goes, **Atmosphere** and **Plot** are up to you. Here are the rest of the ratings.
Interaction 95%
Lastability 97%
Value for money 94%
Overall 98%

NORTH SEA BULLION ADVENTURE

Kuma, £3.95 cass

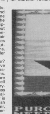


Despite the fact that I suffer from aquaphobia, it was with some interest that I came to review *North Sea Bullion Adventure*. There were two reasons for this. First of all, I had never seen a Kuma adventure before and consequently had no idea what to expect. Secondly, dreaming about owning vast amounts of money is one of my favourite pastimes.

You play the captain of a salvage tug called the 'Narwal' and your mission is to recover some precious cargo, lost while on the ill-fated HMS Bearheart. All gripping stuff, you must admit — but there's more. No good adventure is complete without its fair share of dangers and nasties and, true to all the best computerised cliches *NSB* has storms, unstable explosives and killer fish. Whoopee!

What else can you ask for? When the game loads you have the option of reading some reasonably detailed instructions. These give a fairly clear picture of what has to be done (well clearer than the graphics anyway, but we have yet to discuss these). However, they are appallingly written and the display is just about the most amateurish I've ever come across. To be fair, there is one unusually considerate option at the end — asking me whether I wanted to read them again. No thank you. Still, I suppose it's the thought that counts.

The adventure has some of the aspects of more conventional graphic adventures, such as those by Level 9. There is a graphic window in the top left of the screen with various status notes displayed on the right. However on certain prompts, this changes to a full text screen ('full text' meaning that there are no graphics — the screen is still fairly sparse).

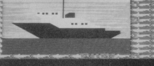


The first thing you need to do is equip your ship. There's oxygen, fuel and steel plate (!) just for starters. Fortunately, Kuma supply a small hint sheet without which some of the stages of the game (including the introduction) could leave you severely unstuck. This tells you how to equip yourself effectively for the expedition.

Once the game gets under way you begin to wish you were back at port, buying up stocks. At first this impression of seasickness rather impressed me as I thought it must be the atmosphere that was getting out of hand. However, I soon realised that the reason for the rising feeling of nausea was far more subtle. It all came down to the game itself. Sure, there are interesting details like setting up the diving operations and I even found a bar of gold (no cheers, folks — it's not that hard). But the main problem is that the game holds no challenge at all.

There are input difficulties as well. This really isn't attempting to compete with Infocom or Level 9 but the lack of ability to express what I wanted to do was more than somewhat annoying. One of its better ideas is that you decide when the game is over and you judge your performance accordingly. Perhaps then, (he says, avoiding the temptation to be cynical) as a beginner's game, this wouldn't be a total failure but even then, it is likely to come up against competition from superior introductory material such as 8TH Day's *Ice Station Zero* which I intend to review next month. But that's another story..

Atmosphere 23%
Plot 39%
Interaction 42%
Value for money 40%
Overall 39%





GENESIS

CRL, £9.95 cass

It seems that this is the season for adventure writing utilities. I suppose there's a degree of logic behind this thinking, what with the long cold nights looming nearer. And so CRL have presented us with a utility for writing graphic adventures complete with synchronised sound effects for only ten quid! Impressive?

Well, what you get for your money is a single cassette and a small, but well printed manual. The cassette is crammed with material. Apart from a sample adventure, written with the utility (which seems to be the norm nowadays), you get three programs that all add up to the complete package. The first of these is the TEXTURE utility. This handles the meat of the adventure. Messages, descriptions, objects, flags and other such fundamental ingredients are dealt with in this part of the program. There is also the DEPICTER program which handles the creation of graphics and sound effects for the adventure. Lastly, there is the CLONER program. Basically, this puts everything together.

Most people would start off using a utility like this one by playing with the graphics, so I will too. Up to 250 pictures may be created with it. It is possible to define the graphics mode they are to be drawn in (including having different modes for different pictures) and it is even possible to define the size and position of different graphic and text windows and employ the use of User Defined Graphics to create backgrounds. This means that with time and a little imagination, any adventure created with *Genesis* could look totally original and avoid falling into the trap of appearing to be formula produced. How many colours are usable depends on the graphics mode selected for that window. Several interesting graphic functions for defining boxes, circles, curves etc. are provided but the actual editing features are a little obscure and unwieldy. The solidity of the graphic areas themselves is also shoddy. Windows looking badly drawn and predefined functions were inefficiently implemented.

Creating sound effects takes the form of setting up waveform, frequency and note sequence for each graphic area. This is reasonably presented but inexplicably scattered across different menus, making the association of various parts of the sound creation process rather tenuous. Notes (ie written ones) become very necessary, very quickly. A sample one-octave keyboard is used to create the final tune. All three voices can be used and again, editing features are well designed, including a test playback feature for various parts of the sound track.

The TEXTURE part of the program is by far the hardest to use of any adventure writer I've ever come across. The menu options are badly laid out (in fact one of the worst aspects of this program is the menus — too many of them, too badly laid out). The input of textual information is handled on an eighty column screen, which is good but much of the status and action checking employs the use of some very unfriendly code which is almost impossible to read easily on such a display.

There's nothing incredibly new, thought provoking or innovative about the way this part of the program has been designed. It's a case of very careful manual reference before you can do anything. That leads to problems in itself, as the manual is unfriendly in terms of explanation and example. It's not that CRL have neglected to explain how things work. It's just that most of the explanations are untidy and convoluted. This runs the risk of leaving the first time designer totally confused about how to create his masterpiece. This is unfortunate because TEXTURE is really about as powerful as *The Quill* in most respects but taking advantage of the program's power requires a great deal of patience on the part of the user. The manual employs some sloppy symbolism (such as the over-use of the '&' sign for just about everything) and for no apparent reason.

The CLONER program puts the relevant bits of your adventure together and turns them into a usable game. I could see no reason at all for having to work within such a clumsy system and found the transfer of different data files annoying after a while. Maybe the whole thing would have been better on disk, but alas, this was not the case. Even the sample adventure supplied with *Genesis* has to be constructed using the CLONER program. This will deter a lot of potential users because of the messing around involved.

For the price, CRL have come up with a program capable of producing original looking adventures with a reasonable degree of user interface capability. However, the cryptic nature of almost every aspect of programming such an adventure will mean many people give up before coming to grips with it. It's good to see such a utility so reasonably priced — but this one would be most unlikely to succeed if it were any more expensive.

As with *GAC*, the atmosphere and plot are up to you and this leaves . . .

Interaction 61%
Value for money 77%
Overall 65%

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CHIMERA

Firebird, £3.50, cass
Author: S Ahmed

In the wake of Ultimate's popular *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*, Firebird have launched the flagship of the Silversoft fleet, *Chimera*. You, being a highly qualified astronaut, have been sent into space to explore a UFO recently detected from Earth. You soon find that this is hardly what anyone could have expected as it bears the most remarkable resemblance to a ghost ship.

There is no apparent reasoning behind this alien identity crisis and so you continue to investigate, undeterred. You find yourself in a forced perspective spaceship not unlike the one past Ultimate efforts. You even move like a robot.

The plot is straightforward from here on in. You have to go about the ship using a mixture of stealth and lateral thought to enable the cracking of some problems. The aim is to set up a number of missiles and arm them, in order to destroy the satellite (or whatever it really is). You have to keep up your supplies of food and water, otherwise you'll meet your metaphorical maker much sooner than you'd like.

At the bottom of the screen are displays to show how much food and water you currently have; what object you are carrying and heartbeat readout. Water depletes more rapidly when you're near to a radiator (of which there are several).

There are no wandering baddies to shorten your life but there are things like electric fences which suffice for the purpose of ending the game. Many of the items required to finish the game (and others) are hidden from your view to the screen layout, so it's best to have a good wander around. Once the missiles are all armed and ready, you have to get back to a particular room near to the starting location, so you can make your escape.

Control keys: CURSOR KEYS (four directional movement); SPACE (pick up/use) or DEFINABLE.



CRITICISM

1 *Chimera* **bears an unfortunate resemblance to the Ultimate games based on 3D techniques. In fact it's almost visually identical in parts. Some of the 3D is ever so slightly out of perspective but not enough to notice unless closely examining the screen. Movement is easy to get the hang of and works well.**

Despite resemblances, this game has quite a bit of originality going for it, once you get into the plot. Considering the money I think it's a very good game indeed. It's not as massive as some other graphic adventures but the puzzles should keep you occupied for quite a while.

2 I'm afraid to see I wasn't massively keen on the game. It was too similar to those I've played before and not really as good. The puzzles are a bit too obscure for my liking. That's not to say I found them too difficult, on the contrary, they were rather easy once I was in the right frame of mind. It's just that they seemed a bit too silly for my tastes. To be fair though, this game does offer quite an entertaining diversion and for the price, it's almost unbeatable. This quality of graphics would be a welcome sight on many a more expensive game. For those who haven't encountered anything quite like this before, it's a good buy.

3 *The graphics in this game are very pretty indeed, despite being highly derivative, the inspiration almost certainly coming from Ultimate's* Alien 8. *The actual game itself is of the 'find one object to enable you to get another object so you can then . . . etc etc' type. Initially the solutions seem obscure and need quite a bit of lateral thinking, though once you get into it, the programmer's thinking becomes a bit clearer.*

The whole game struck me as unremarkable though it should provide some enjoyment, especially considering the price.

Presentation 69%
Displaying the ASCII values of redifined characters on the main menu, wasn't the friendliest way to deal with the problem.

Graphics 81%
Smooth and high-res but inevitably lacking in colour as a consequence.

Sound 76%
Good music and interesting sound effects (when they occur).

Playability 75%
Easy to get going but far harder to actually solve the problems.

Addictive qualities 84%
There's quite a bit to do in this game and it will take some working out.

Value for money 94%
At the price this has to be a bargain.

Overall 86%
Though not the most origi fal game released this year, it plays well, sustains interest and (best of all) is well programmed.



TRAFFIC

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

The game presents you with an overhead view of a layout of junctions. Using a cursor you have to take control of the traffic lights and make sure no jams build up. The game comes complete with the appropriate noises such as honking horns when a jam is allowed to build up. If you let the traffic jams get too big then the game ends.

Traffic is a game where decisions have to made quickly failure to do so means long traffic jams. Initial excitement flags with the similarities of the tasks. The graphics are limited with cars represented by simple white rectangles. A game with a novel idea behind it but unfortunately it soon becomes very boring.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 32%

ER BERT

Microbyte, £5.95 cass

Er Bert, as the name suggests, is a 'Q Bert' variant. You control a character with a long nose who jumps around a 3D block of cubes changing their colour as he goes. On the first sheet you only have to change the colour of the blocks once but on later screens you have to jump on the cubes more that once to get the4 colour right. Hopping off the edge of the construct is fatal. Also hopping about on the cubes with you are other creatures that kill if they land on a square you are occupying. You can avoid these nasties by jumping onto a transporter disc (this takes you to the top of the cube construction), more often than not they try to follow you and end up plunging over the edge to their death.

Hardly an original game but quite a playable one. The graphics are colourful but tend to be let down by their flicker. If you like arcade games then this one is for you! It's very playable and can prove addictive once you have got the hang of jumping between blocks.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 69%

BATTLE FOR MIDWAY

PSS, £9.95 cass

Taking the World War II naval and air battle as its basis, *The Battle For Midway* has you re-enacting the famous fight and perhaps altering the original outcome. This game is almost purely a strategy game. You control a certain amount of units and so do the Japanese. The only problem with the game is that the enemy tend to be a bit predictable and thus allow for easy victories.

It is a shame that *Battle For Midway* suffers from average graphics and poor sound as do a lot of strategy games. There is also a rather odd inclusion of an arcade sequence, which is likely to upset strategy purists, and which in itself isn't very brilliant. It is almost certain that if the look of the game was improved then more people would enjoy it. As strategies go this is a reasonable one that will appeal to the novice.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 57%

SHORT'S FUSE

Firebird, £2.50 cass

AMSTRAD CPC 464

SHORT'S FUSE

FIREBIRD

The game starts at the Taj Mahal where you must collect bomb detonators before a bomb goes off. You have nine seconds in which you must get each detonator. Should you fail to get a detonator within the time limit then the bomb explodes and you lose a life.

On completing the first screen you progress to the next one and a different famous backdrop. There are five screens to defuse though and each one gets progressively harder. This appeared in a slightly different form on the Spectrum over a year ago under the programmer's own label.

Initially *Short's Fuse* is very frustrating but once you get used to playing at high speeds it becomes reasonably addictive. The backdrops are pretty to look at but other than that the graphics are plain and uninteresting. As budget software goes this is a nice game but not really worth recommending.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 47%

TRIVIA UK

Anirog, £8.95 cass

Trivial Pursuits is the most successful board game to have appeared this decade, so it is only natural that such a popular pastime should incite a plethora of carbon copy games. Anirog's *Trivia UK* is the first computerised version of this type to be released on the Amstrad.

Most of these games tend to be similar to the original money spinner, but some details have to be altered to avoid copyright infringement. It is possible that *Trivia UK* is a licensed version of the game that started it all but there is no confirmation of this on the package. This is a little unusual as the game itself is a pretty close copy of *Trivial Pursuits*.

For those of you unfamiliar with that game, the general idea is that you move a playing piece across a board that is divided into a variety of squares, each representing one of six areas of general knowledge. On landing on a square, you have to answer a question (picked randomly from a large box of cards) from the corresponding area of knowledge. These areas are **History**, **Geography**, **Entertainment**, **Sports & Leisure**, **Art & Literature** and **Science & Nature**. If you answer the question incorrectly, play moves to the next player. You get another move each time you answer correctly however. Sometimes you land on a square that says, 'Roll again' and you do just that. At certain points on the board there are six highlighted squares representing the different subjects. If you answer a question correctly on one of these squares, you get an appropriately coloured 'segment' that is slotted into your playing piece. When all six of the different segments have been collected, you have won. The simplicity of the rules is intended so that all the fun comes from the obscure questions and their often hilarious solutions.

The computer game comes as a two-cassette file in four parts, so there are an awful lot of questions there. The game itself may be played with between two and four people but there is NO single player option. The board, unlike the original, is a rectangle without spokes. This takes up most of the screen display with a lower information window where questions and their solutions appear, dice rolls are made (for board movement) and other miscellaneous information may be accessed. When a turn is taken, a series of die throws are shown and then the player is shown the squares clockwise or anti-clockwise to where the piece may move. Using the keyboard to select the chosen colour of the square, the piece then moves and unless the square is grey (roll again), a relevant question appears in the window. You are supposed to guess aloud for the benefit of the other players, and press fire for the answer. If you were correct, pressing fire again allows you to have another go. The collecting of 'segments' on the important squares is shown in the centre of the board.

CRITICISM

1 The original board game is successful because it makes for a social affair, and the way I've played it, persons picking out the questions can also see the answers and then offer clues, which in themselves add to the flavour of the event. *Trivia UK* is one of those computer games that may appeal to people who like the original on which it's based, but it's also one of those games where the programmers have settled for a very basic graphic



representation without any of the frills which help you to enjoy it. The result is an ugly looking board that I found quite confusing. It also takes an age to load . . .

2 There's nothing quite like playing *Trivial Pursuits* after you've had a few pints. Well, that's one of the things you'll miss with this version. There are other things you'll miss as well, like atmosphere and the sense of competition (and even rolling the die). If your over-riding love is just for quiz games, then this will certainly give you something to chew on. As usual with this kind of thing, it loses out to the original in the long run.

3 *The main problem with multi-player dependent games, is that it's so hard to imagine everyone wanting to spend most of the evening staring at a monitor screen, when the board is far more attractive and comfortable. The game loses all its abstract qualities when put on the computer. There's one good thing though. If you're one of the millions who has been let down by the lack of new questions for the original, this is a relatively cheap way of supplying them!*

Presentation 70%
Decent packaging and layout.

Graphics 39%
They have to be fairly simple for this kind of game, but that rolling die could have been done better.

Sound 20%
Beep, if you get my meaning.

Playability 64%
Easy to get going, but proves more difficult with more players.

Addictive qualities 61%
Actually, it is quite likely to make you go and buy the original.

Value for money 67%
Provides a good way of supplying extra questions for the original game.

Overall 62%
Not bad, but unless you couple it with *Trivial Pursuits*, you'll miss out.

PAWS

Artic, £7.95, cass

If you fancy being catty, or simply feline then *Paws* is just a game that may interest you. A rather nasty situation has developed — Bull Dog Billy and his bunch of Bully Boys have taken a slight disliking to you to say the least and are out to get you.

You see, something rather horrible has happened. Usually you and your moggy friends are protected from these canine cads by the 'catoplexic energy' generated from the presence of all the cats and kittens in the district. But! (there's always a but) the kittens have strayed and the lifesaving energy has been depleted.

Naturally (since you're playing the game) it's up to you to go out and find the strays and bring them back safely so all the pussies can live happily ever after. If you don't then you and your clan are in trouble.

The game is set around a city and its suburbs and rubbish tips which is presented as a plan view *Sabre Wulf* style. It also works in the same way as *Sabre Wulf* where the screen flicks as you move from one to the other rather than scrolls with you. The game has many screens and these all add up to make a very large map.

As you wander around, you encounter many of the Bully Gang (who all look suspiciously like sausage dogs). When you do so you have a choice — either sling one of your highly deadly fur balls at them (this results in them exploding?!?) or you can stand and fight. The disadvantage is that paw-to-paw combat tends to cost a lot in energy.

This energy is presented on screen as two separate numbers — strength and stamina, both totals constantly ticking down during the game, although they can be replenished by running over the many objects littered around the maze. As you delve further and further into the

GAMES INDEX

HUNTER KILLER

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

This is simulation is set inside a submarine on a seek and destroy mission. You patrol an area of the North Sea off the German coast and your task is to seek out and destroy any German submarines. Using the periscope you have to get the enemy sub in sight and sink it using torpedoes. This is no easy task and requires quite a bit of practice to become competent. As well as the difficulty of actually controlling the sub, you are in constant threat from other such niceties as coastal mines, depth charges and destroyers and aircraft.

Hunter Killer is a very frantic game and has you constantly flicking through several screens to examine the various gauges. The graphics and sound tend to let it down a bit as does the initial frustration of controlling the Hunter Killer submarine, which proves to be every bit as finicky as an airliner. Quite a good game for simulation addicts but it is difficult to get the hang of it.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 56%

AMERICAN FOOTBALL

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

The Spectrum version of *American Football* was considered to be quite a good representation of the famous american sport and luckily its conversion to the Amstrad is reasonable. The aim of the game is to get the ball into your opponents 'endzone' and score a touch down. Your team is split into two distinct units, the attackers and the defence. Depending on what position a man plays determines the types of moves that he can make.

This game will mainly appeal to fans of American Football who enjoy the esoteric strategies of the real sport because the game relies on developing and using good tactics. Sadly the graphics and sound are rather poor though adequate to the task. Overall it is a good strategy but it may prove too slow moving for arcade addicts.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 65%

JOHNNY REB

Lothlorien, £6.95 cass

This game was originally brought out on the Spectrum quite some time ago and it was considered to be a reasonable strategy game in its time. The Amstrad version is also reasonable but very dated. The action is set during the American Civil War and you can choose to be either the Confederates or the Union. Whichever, your task is to capture the enemy's flag. The game is played on a gridded map of the surrounding terrain and your forces are represented by cannon, horses and foot-soldiers depending on the function of that unit.

Johnny Reb is a particularly good game if you are a novice strategist because it's easy to play and without too much effort you should be able to beat the computer. One of its novel features is the ability to set your skill level and time limit, which allows for quick games. The sound is feeble and the graphics could have been improved upon by several margins.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 45%

ROLAND ON THE RUN

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Roland and some mates are trying to escape from Amsoft. Hidden in a train you have to get him and up to 254 others off the train and into the safety of a lorry that takes them to their hideouts. The only problem is that they have to jump from the train into the lorry and this can prove difficult. As the train roars down the track you can control its speed to match that of the lorries. When a man in the train flashes you must jump him onto the lorry. Effectively you have 255 and one is lost for each misjump.

As there is only one screen the game looks pretty dull and soon becomes boring. Graphics are reasonable but the sound is terrible. Hardly worth £8.95

Overall AMTIX! rating: 19%

SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Lothlorien, £6.95 cass

It is almost the end of World War II and you have been given a squad of four troops with which you must penetrate a base in enemy territory containing a deadly new weapon. Your first option is to decide which mission you are to take. The easier ones have you entering the base and taking photographs while in the harder tasks you have to discover the secrets of the new weapon. Before you start you must select the team and the particular talents that they possess.

The graphics and sound used in *Special Ops* are abysmal but this aside the game can be enjoyable for a short while. A bit below average but it may some specialist appeal.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 49%



CATASTROPHES

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

You have to construct a building in the North Sea that can withstand anything that the weather may throw at it. You only have a helicopter to do this. The idea is to bring blocks from the mainland and drop them onto the started building lest they drop into the sea. Every now and then a lighthouse flashes to inform you of approaching storms. These storms can do a lot of damage to your building so you have to work frantically.

Gameplay in *Catastrophes* is pretty limited, very repetetive and ultimately rather empty, though it may appeal to younger gamers. The graphics are reasonable as is the sound but always performing the same tasks makes it very dull after a while.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 44%

SPLAT!

Incentive, £8.95 cass

Taking place in randomly scrolling series of mazes you control a happy little character called Zippy. Zippy likes eating grass but doesn't much enjoy getting spiked or being forced into water. What makes *Splat!* original is that the edges of the screen scroll and eventually may trap and splat Zippy if you get him into a dead end at the wrong moment. Eating grass helps get you to the next level.

For such a simple game idea and with its simplistic graphics and sound, *Splat* is delightfully addictive. Totally original and very playable it makes for an enjoyable game that isn't too demanding.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 75%

GATECRASHER

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

At the top of the screen is the character that you control. You must drop barrels through a maze of gates to land in the boxes at the bottom. You must judge where and when to drop a barrel so that it doesn't roll off the edge of the screen.

Graphics and sound are a bit below average but there is some nice animation at the start of the game when you roll a barrel. Initially a fun game it soon becomes boring because of the lack of variation in the theme, although a surprising amount of skill is required to complete some of the screens.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 32%

3D TIME TREK

Anirog, £6.95 cass

3D Time Trek is based on the old Star Trek games like the recent *Vagan Attack*. Except this one supposedly has 3D graphics. The idea behind the game is to defend an 8 x 8 galaxy from marauding aliens. Once you have warped to a sector containing an enemy you have to fight it out and try to destroy the alien craft with your lasers.

This type of game is extremely dated now and provides very little enjoyment. *3D Time Trek* has nothing new to add to the old formula and you would probably be better off with *Code Name Mat* or *Code Name Mat II* whch are far more advanced. The graphics and sound are terrible, this coupled with boring game play means that interest is lost very quickly.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 19%

JUMP JET

Anirog, £9.95 cass

Controlling a Jump Jet on board a naval carrier, it is your mission to seek and destroy enemy craft before they destroy you. There are two main screens involved, one from inside the cockpit with your instruments positioned below the horizon, and another at the start of the game which shows the Jump Jet from above on the aircraft carrier. Once off the carrier the view switches to display the horizon. If an enemy craft appears on your radar then you must lock on to it and shoot it down with a missile very quickly.

For a simulation the graphics on this game are quite good as is the sound but there is still plenty of room for improvement. Initially *Jump Jet* is frustrating but with a bit a practice and skill it can become reasonably addictive.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 51%

XANAGRAMS

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

This is a sort of cross between 'Hangman' and a crossword. You have to guess words in the crossword by guessing them one letter at a time. In each crossword layout there is a maximum of five words. To the right of the screen there are the letters that appear in each word. You then place the letters where you think that they should appear. Points are scored for placing letters in the right place.

Xanagram's appeal is in the working out of anagrams. If you don't then it becomes extremely boring. Graphics and sound are severely limited and there is no real lasting appeal to it.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 17%

game these objects become rarer and rarer making paw-to-paw combat very risky, since if either your strength or stamina reaches zero you lose one of your nine lives.

To give you a little help during the game, the map provides the locations of all the dogs, your home (where you have to take the kittens), the kittens and your current position.

If you happen to die whilst transporting a kitten home then you lose him/her and have to go and get it again. During the game a 'K9 level' timer is constantly ticking. The higher this gets, the more dogs you encounter. Consequently you've really got to shift if you're to get anywhere before the dogs pack together and really come after you.

There are five different levels from which to select at the beginning of a game to make life more entertaining, especially if you've already solved it on a lower level.

Control keys: O/A up/down; P/Q left/right; Space to fire.

CRITICISM

1 **When I first played this I was amazed . . . I played for what seemed like hours without losing a life. My score was huge and I would have kept on playing if it hadn't been for an interruption from a phone call (when I came back a certain S Masterson had switched it off). It was just like playing one of the three arcade machines I own. The game is diabolically easy and the graphics, animation and sound are really abysmal, even for an Amstrad. The colours used were amazingly eye wrenching — more like the sort of thing might find in a pool outside a pub late on Saturday night. If you like really simple, slow and pretty dull maze games then rush out now and purchase this, otherwise give something else a whirl.**

2 Mundane is the word I'm tempted to use to describe this misguided piece of waffle, but it doesn't really do justice to the catatonic state induced by playing the game for more than a few minutes. The sprites don't flicker — and the screens change fairly quickly. That's about all that can be said to compliment it. Prehistoric drivel might also express something of the sense of disappointment and disgust at this outdated farce. Poor animation and design could almost be forgivable if the game itself were in the least bit enjoyable to play. But sadly, nothing could be further than the truth. Forget it.

3 *Everybody makes mistakes, and may I suggest that Paws is one of them. The game belongs somewhere else. Perhaps as part of a development idea from two years ago. The sprites are very poorly drawn and animated. The colour scheme should really come with an NHS warning. Unforgivable in its incompetence, the game should really be forgotten by everybody, including Artic who have been responsible for far better in the past.*

Presentation 52%
Average-ish presentation with reasonable level select.

Graphics 35%
Slow, gaudy and horrible.

Sound 20%
Did somebody say something?

Playability 41%
Easy to play and S-L-O-W.

Addictive qualities 53%
Oddly addictive to play because of simplicity, but therefore the game swiftly palls.

Value for money 39%
A slow, well below average game.

Overall 20%
Not very awe-inspiring.

GAMES INDEX

ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

In charge of the famous German battleship it is your mission to journey around the South Atlantic sinking as many of the enemy ships as possible. Being a semi-strategy game there are two main screens: the map screen on which the enemy vessels are depicted and a close up screen of your ship. On this screen you engage the enemy in battle.

To sink the enemy ships you have guns and torpedos but only a limited supply of ammo. This part of the game is quite boring especially as you can't dodge the enemy's fire power. The game ends either when you are sunk or if you fail to rendezvous with the supply ship for a new supply of ammunition.

The graphics and sound on this game were poor on the original Spectrum version and this lack of quality remains. On the whole the game is quite boring, although it may have some limited appeal to strategists.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 31%

ALEX HIGGINS' WORLD SNOOKER

Amsoft, £8.95

This snooker game is played like almost all the other snooker games and their varients. You move a cursor around the screen and position it where you wish the ball to go. On this



version you have the choice of how many red balls you would like on the table. Normal snooker rules apply except the free ball when snookered off a foul shot.

Alex Higgins' Snooker is not an over impressive game. The graphics of the balls are poor and they move very jerkily. Generally a reasonable snooker game but *Steve Davis' Snooker* presents much better value for money.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 41%

CUBIT

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

Cubit is a sort of 3D noughts and cross on a 4 x 4 cube where you have to get a row of 4 pieces before your opponent does. You have the option of playing the computer or another opponent.

The graphics aren't too good but the game is quite enjoyable and the two player option allows for some good matches between friends. The game idea is quite worn now but offers a reasonable game to the spatial puzzler, although it is a bit over priced for what little you get.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 37%

ROLAND GOES SQUARE BASHING

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

You have to guide Roland around a sort of 3D maze eroding blocks as he goes until there are no blocks left. Altogether there are 20 levels of blocks which get progressively harder with each new level.

The game takes quite a long time to complete and is reasonably addictive for a while. The graphics are quite good but the 3D doesn't quite work. Overall it's a poor game without any real lasting appeal in it.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 21%

MASTERCHESS

Amsoft, £8.95 cass

This is a pretty bog standard chess game with few innovative ideas implemented. You can choose from one of ten skill levels, redefine the colour of the board and set up problems for the computer to solve.

Recently with the release of *Cyrus II* chess this type of game has taken a leap forward on the Amstrad. While the computer plays a reasonable game the presentation is poor with the program providing very primitive graphics. There are now better chess games around.

Overall AMTIX! rating: 54%

WILLOW PATTERN ADVENTURE

Firebird, £3.95 cass
Author: Mr. Micro

Willow Pattern Adventure is a conversion of the famous Chinese legend of the Willow Pattern. For those ignorant to the ways of ancient Chinese culture, you'll probably be made to feel even more ignorant by the fact that it's likely that you've seen a pictorial representation of this myth many a time. You know those pretty blue blue chinese plates? Well, looking closely will leave you staring into the past, entangled in the story of two estranged lovers manacled to a life of woe (aaah). The beautiful princess Koong-Shee is being forced to marry the merchant Ta Jin by her wilful father, Li Chi. Sadly she loves a clerk, Chang, well below her status and not fitting for the hand of a princess. His only hope is force his way into the mandarin's palace and elope with the princess.

The trouble is that the Mandarin's castle is heavily guarded with skilled fighters of all ranks. Penniless clerk that Chang is, he can't afford expensive deadly weapons like those that belong to the guards of the palace. His only option is to depend on the odd stray weapon, often found lying around the palace. With a quick flick of the fire button Chang can now destroy the sword throwing Samurai warriors.

The game takes place among the graceful gardens of the Mandarin, Li Chi. To rescue and elope with the princess, Chang will have to complete the many tasks set before him. The game is of the collect and use type, first pioneered by Ultimate with their Spectrum creations. The gardens themselves are laid out in the style of a maze bordered by various flora and fauna. Chang is controlled around the different screens with the aid of a joystick and fire unleashes any weapons in your possession. While guiding little Chang about, you soon find that upon passing the boundary of a screen, the next one flicks into view with you appearing on the side you entered from.

Positioned in places of the most inconvenience are the Katana weilding Samurai, set on barring any tresspassers way. Come within striking distance and a sword will come flying Chang's way, lobbed by one of the guards. If he doesn't move a bit sharpish, then the life counter takes a turn for the worse. To get past a guard, a sword is handy and if our hero has found and picked up one of the few laying around the maze, he'll find himself far better equipped for Samurai bashing.

Blocking the path in some choice spots in the garden are bridges spanning one of the rivers flowing throughout the garden. For some reason, Chang must not cross the bridge and is force to use the stepping stones beneath them. On top of the bridge are three giant prawns waving their tails over the sides. To get to the other side he has to jump between the stepping stones, leaping in time to avoid the swinging prawn tails.

To complete his adventure it's necessary for Chang to gain a key to free the princess. He'll then have to hotfoot it back to a waiting boat with the princess' angry father legging it after them.

Control keys: Q/A up/down, O/P left/right and space for fire.

CRITICISM

1 **This pleasent little arcade game is quite striking at first, due to its exceptional presentation and graphics. Though sparks of originality sometimes shone through, for example the giants leaning over the bridge, overall the scenario and execution is very hackneyed.**



The sprites move about the screens smoothly until you get into the bridge screen. The main man clashes with the background awfully. The game itself is a bit simple and really it just comes down to collecting swords and killing the Samurai in the right order.

Willow Pattern **is quite a good game for the money and will provide quite a few challenges and thrills for the money though real connoisseurs of arcade may find it a bit crude.**

2 Firebird really have improved their product with the launch of their Super Silver range. *Willow Pattern Adventure* is of a very high standard indeed, easily rivalling the full priced product of many a other company. The graphics are extremely good, both in the way they move and look. On getting down to actually playing the game, I soon found it to be quite simple but its simplicity creates the game's appeal to a certain extent. This definitely has to be one of the best budget releases to date.

3 *Technically competent it may be, I still don't like it. Apart from being a boring implementation of a potentially interesting plot, it just doesn't look terrifying to be attacked by king sized prawns. In fact it positively whets the appetite. It's commendable to see such care going in to what is really just a budget game (more other manufacturers should do the same), it doesn't come off as a particularly interesting game, at the end of the day. Worth the money, certainly. But it strikes me as incongruous.*

Presentation 72%
Very Chinese and quite atmospheric.

Graphics 88%
Very pretty indeed, though you may find them a little repetitious.

Sound 81%
Interesting.

Playability 76%
Similar gameplay to *Sabre Wulf* makes for enjoyable game.

Addictive qualities 65%
Plenty of challenge though interest may soon lag.

Value for money 79%
At slightly above budget price, well worth the pennies asked.

Overall 79%
Though we've seen it all before, *Willow Pattern* is still a nice variation on an old theme .



ARGO NAVIS

Kuma, £6.95 cass, keys only

The aim of *Argo Navis* is to destroy a spaceship. This would be a simple task involving the taking of a number of fuses to the correct room and priming them, if it weren't for the ship's alien inhabitants, some more dangerous than others, and their warlike neighbours who have the ship under attack.

Argo Navis is an arcade adventure of large proportions, containing 96 cabins. Each cabin is rectangular in shape and most are made up from platforms interconnected by ladders. To travel between cabins you merely walk off the edge of the screen and are flicked onto the next. The spaceman is able to use the gangways and ladders of the ship and can go left, right and jump. The bottom part of the screen represents the view of the ship while at the top oxygen and phaser status are shown. The amount of oxygen you have left decides how long you are going to be playing. Bumping into wandering aliens or falling from platforms depletes the initially adequate oxygen supply. However it's replenishable by jumping and reaching various oxygen bottles scattered about the ship's decks. Phaser power shows the energy left in the phaser gun, issued as standard equipment. This continually recharges itself but if you fire off too many rounds at one time you may find the gun useless for a while.

Around the ship are various security doors, which can be lowered or raised with the security box placed elsewhere on the screen. If you try to pass them, your oxygen decreases at a vast rate. A security box is activated merely by jumping over it, but when one is moved, it usually blocks another gangway. Typically the gangways are placed so as to cause the most hassle when moving security doors. The end blocks of the ship's platforms drain oxygen if you run into them. To make things harder they're usually placed close to a screen entry point, so it's all too easy to run blindly into a screen and find your oxygen flowing away as you mindlessly bang your head on an end stop.

If you haven't forgotten, the ship is under attack from the aliens' neighbouring aliens. Jumping over a battle port, causes the scene to cut to the exterior, a 3D starfield that moves in response to the direction keys. The attacking space craft whizzes about, moving in and out of the foreground, getting bigger and bigger. To make things a bit harder it also constantly changes course.

Back to the task in hand — destruction of the ship you have just saved with your hot dogging 3D space fight: the fuses, or self-destruct crystals, are shown as blue circles in white borders. You collect these by jumping through them, and once this is done, they must be placed in the right cabins. Then it's time for you to make a last ditch, panicked run to the airlock, lest the ship blows up from under your feet.

Control keys: No joystick option, Z/X left/right; jump and space for fire.

CRITICISM

1 **I must admit to having seen a a variety of games of this type before, and in comparison *Argo Navis* comes off pretty poor. The only really original feature I could think of was the inclusion of the simple space battle scene. The game itself is of a very simple sort indeed. The objective is clear and once you get into playing the thing you soon find it's just a case of opening and closing the security doors in the right order.**

The graphics are fairly chunky, though the main sprite is nicely animated. As the backgrounds are extremely simple with a minimun of scenery, they soon get repetitive. Not a bad game though it could have been better, if arcade/adventures are your scene, you may be tempted, otherwise it's probably worth a miss.

2 I thought the game was nothing more than a very bad let down. The loading screen is really excellently drawn and it led me to expect a lot more than the game actually offered. The graphics are well animated but that isn't much of a consolation when they are poorly drawn in the first place. When your character jumps, movement slows down (and it's not that fast to start with). There are one or two good ideas in the game and the actual screen design is well thought out. I just wish the thing had been more aesthetically pleasing and more fun to play. Monotonous sums it up.

3 *I didn't think the game was all that bad for the first few sessions, though I couldn't imagine becoming addicted. It's too much like a cliché. There aren't enough new features added to this old style to give it a second lease of life. The colour choice is a little limited and some of the displays and text could have been made clearer. Fun for a while, this one, but after that you're likely to suffer from a mild form of amnesia.*

Presentation 62%
Lovely loading screen but that's about it.

Graphics 57%
Decent animation but ineffectual in most other respects.

Sound 47%
Primitive, to say the least.

Playability 75%
An easy game to get playing . . .

Addictive qualities 50%
. . . but not one you're likely to keep playing.

Value for money 57%
Should really be budget software.

Overall 52%
Too much for too little.

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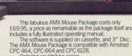
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(No, not the 32 tonners, the game from CRL, frogbrain!)

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Not an easy job, pal, this lorry driving lark. Not for the rank beginner. Then again, you could always get in a bit of practice with CRL's whizzo lorry manipulating game, *Juggernaut*. Your 'umble competition minion saw his opportunity when Ian Ellery from CRL visited AMTIX! Towers recently and filled him with some Old Flatulence Bitter to loosen his judgement a little. Then he was told it was about time CRL did a competition.

Ludlow's killer bitter beer did the trick yet again, your expense-accountless minion is pleased to be able to report back. Ellery coughed up — just prizes folks, just prizes — and as a consequence there's a smasheroonie radio-controlled truck for us to give away as first prize in this truckin' compo, with thirty copies of *Juggernaut* the game on offer for runners up. Just for a chuckle, and to do something different, it seemed a good idea to have a little quiz based on some Citizen's Band Slang (you have to know all about such things, to be a good waggon driver you see).

AMTIX! COMPETITION

Translate these CB phrases into something approaching English

1) 10.10 till we do it again

2) What's your twenty?

3) How many candles you burnin'?

4) Give us a nine

5) Bears in a jam sandwich

6) What's your handle?


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THE CP/M STORY CON

In which our CP/M Correspondent continues his delvings into the operating system brought into being by Digital Research . . .

LAST MONTH, Roy Jones took us on a whistle stop tour of CP/M. Now he continues his travels with a closer look at the kinds of file you can store under CP/M, and an examination of some of the commands available as program files. Such 'Transient' commands are loaded into memory from disc prior to execution, and can be used to perform a host of useful tasks.

In conclusion, our CP/M Guru looks at SWEEP, one of the better known Public Domain utilities, and this time really does give details of how to get hold of PDS — somehow the PDS Library's address didn't make it into last issue. (Not Roy's fault, honestly.)

FILE TYPES

When the built in command **DIR** (short for directory) is typed in against the > prompt, a list of files on the current disk will be displayed for the current user area. A file is a block or blocks of data stored on the disk. Each CP/M file on a disk has a name, which can be up to 11 characters long, and these 11 characters are divided into two parts: the first 8 are the actual filename and the last 3 are called the extension.

File names are chosen by the user and usually give some indication of the contents of the file being named — but are not in themselves significant. The extension, however, is used to identify the file **type** , and is essential for some file types and a matter of convenience for others. Filename extensions include: BAS basic program, ASM assembler source file, FOR fortran program, PAS pascal program, TXT .text file, DOC document file, MAC macro assembler source file, CAL supercalc file, DBF dbase II data file, BAK backup file — and so on.

Issuing COMmands

CP/M has a special interest in files with a COM extension as it assumes they are COMmand files, in other words programs that can be loaded into memory and run. When something is typed in at the keyboard against the prompt, and it is not recognised as one of the built-in commands, CP/M looks on the disk for a COM file which has a filename corresponding to the characters typed in. For instance:

DBASE

causes the disk drive light to come on, showing disk activity while the system looks for a file named DBASE.COM. If DBASE.COM is not on the disk CP/M will come back with the rather blunt message:

DBASE?

or if you have a very friendly system it may be a little more helpful, coming back with a message such as 'File not on disk!' perhaps.

SUBmitting Commands

CP/M also has a special meaning for files with a SUB extension. SUBmit files are used to perform batch functions, and contain batches of commands. The submit function is very useful for performing tasks which require long or complicated lines to be typed in repeatedly, or if you regularly use a group of built-in or transient commands as a sequence. A sequence of commands typed into a .SUB file can be saved away for later use — to execute the saved command sequence you type in the name of the SUBmit file, (including the extension), whereupon the commands are executed sequentially. SUBmit files work in conjunction with one of the standard CP/M utility programs called SUBMIT.COM, which can be looked on as a sort of language interpreter for the SUBmit files.

USER AREAS and FILE DELETION

A file stored on disk may belong to one of sixteen different **user areas**. A user area is not a physically different place on the disk, but is in effect a subdirectory of files which share a common label.

An extra byte of information is appended to the front of the filename when a file is saved to disk. This byte can be set to a value between 0 and 16 and is used to indicate which of the 16 possible user areas the file belongs to. This byte is set automatically, according to the **USER** area current when the file is saved.

Most CP/M users do not make much use of these user areas, but they can be quite useful for keeping all related files in one area. It's also possible to have two or more files with the same name on one disk — as long as they're in different user areas. The command 'USER nn' changes the user area number to 'nn' and all files saved until a further USER command, are saved to that user area.

The byte used to assign a user area to a file also indicates an erased file! When a file is erased it is not actually physically removed from the disk — all that happens is that the value of this first byte in the filename is changed to 229. This tells CP/M to ignore this file in directory searches and also indicates that the disk space occupied by the file is available for re-use. Files which have been erased accidentally or in error can be recovered by changing the value of this byte back from 229 to 0 using a disk editor. Providing that no other files have been copied to the disk in the meantime, then the 'unerased' file should be intact.

COMMANDS and WILDCARDS

To run a command file, only the first part of its name has to be typed in, but in most other cases when a filename is used as the argument in a command, the filename and extension need to be given, separated with a full-stop. For example, if you want to

NTINUES

TYPE a file on the screen the whole of the filename has to be entered:

TYPE FRED.TXT

rather than

TYPE FRED

CP/M allows the use of 'wildcard' characters which can take the place of letters in a file name when used with a command. The wildcards are '*' and '?': the asterisk is more powerful than the questionmark — using the transient command PIP to copy all the files on the disk in drive A to the disk in drive B:

PIP B:=A:*.*

produces the required effect. If the plan was to copy all the command files from drive A to drive B, and nothing else, then:

PIP B:=A:*.COM

would do the trick. The asterisk wildcard can be used to represent a number of characters; on the other hand the questionmark wildcard stands for a single character only. If there was a series of files on drive A named FRED1.TXT, FREDY.TXT, FRED2.TXT, FRED3.TXT and FRED10.TXT then

PIP B:=A:FRED?.TXT

would copy FREDs 1, Y, 2 and 3 to the B drive, but not FRED10 (FRED*.TXT instead of FRED?.TXT gets FRED10 across too!). With a bit of thought, the wildcards can save a lot of typing when it comes to using commands that use filenames as their arguments . . .

PIP.COM, short for Peripheral Interchange Program, is a standard CP/M utility program — a transient command, indeed — which is most commonly used to copy files from one disk to another. PIP can actually do a lot more than just copy files from one drive to another, however, and can be used to send files to a printer or other devices, and to filter files for example. Note how the colons are used in a PIP command to separate the drivename from the filename

OTHER TRANSIENT COMMANDS

The other transient command programs usually supplied with CP/M are:

STAT.COM — gives information about how much space is left on a disk, how big files are etc.
ED.COM — a rather crude form of text editor. In the absence of something better it can be used to generate program source files but it's quite hard to use.
DUMP.COM — dumps the contents of a file in HEXADECIMAL format.
ASM.COM — the CP/M assembler. It is used to assemble a source program file written in 8080 assembly language. From this it produces a HEX format file which can then be turned into a COMmand program by using **LOAD.COM** which goes with it. The inclusion of these programs probably has been one of the contributing factors to the success of CP/M. Although ASM and LOAD may now seem a bit dated they are still very usable and can produce some excellent programs. The 8080 processor was the original 8 bit CPU for CP/M and although nowadays it has been superceded by the Z80 and other CPU's, 8080 assembler is still the 'official' CP/M language and is more or less 100% compatible with Z80 CPU's.
DDT.COM — the CP/M debugging program. It is used to display (and optionally, change) the contents of memory locations in assembler mnemonics or HEX. It can also be used to step through execution of a program and display the contents of the CPU registers; a very powerful tool.
SYSGEN.COM — used to copy the system tracks onto a new disk to create a boot disk.
MOVCPM.COM — used to create a new version of the system for a different memory size.

Some computer manufacturers may omit some of these utilities, or may substitute similar programs of their own. They will usually also supply a program to format diskettes and another to set up the printer ports etc. It used to be fairly common for manufacturers to supply the source code of the BIOS section of the operating system — very useful, as one could then easily make modifications to suit individual needs. Unfortunately manufacturers now seem rather reluctant to give out this information.

PUBLIC DOMAIN UTILITIES

There's quite a variety of programs available, free, from the public domain which can be of great assistance to the CP/M user. One of the most tedious jobs in using CP/M comes when using PIP to handle files —it's easy to get tired of typing things like

PIP B:=A:FRED.TXT□G1□

Probably one of the best known and most useful public domain utility programs is **SWEEP**. Sweep or **NSWP** as the later versions are called is a super file handling program, which combines several functions. It will copy files between disks; rename files; allow files to be viewed on the screen; sort files into alphabetical order; delete files; give the size of files; tell how much space is left on the disk and allow easy transfer of files between different user areas. Later versions can even 'squeeze' disk files so that they take less storage space, as well as set file attributes to read/write, read only etc.

When Sweep is run an alphabetically sorted list of the files on the current disk is displayed with the cursor resting on the first file. There are various options at this stage: if the file is one containing text you can type 'V' to view it on the screen; 'P' to send it to the printer; 'C' to copy it to another drive; 'T' to tag it for future action; 'D' to delete it; 'R' to rename it; 'L' to log into a different disk; 'S' to see how much filespace is left on a disk; 'return' or 'space' to move to the next file; 'B' to go back one or '?' to get a help screen of the available options. Next to each filename displayed is its size in K, and if the TAG option is chosen a running total of size of the tagged files is displayed.

Operations can be performed on all the files which have been tagged: 'M' to mass copy them to any other drive or user area; 'E' to erase them; 'Y' to set file attributes;' 'Q' to squeeze or unsqueeze them . . . and so on. This program is a real time saver. It must have saved me hundreds of hours!

Like many public domain programs SWEEP has been developed over a period of time by a number of different authors. The latest version I have seen is by Dave Rand, of Edmonton, Alberta and is called NSWP207. There is also a version of Sweep available for MSDOS machines, called CWEEP, but it lacks some of the features of the CP/M version. NSWP is available on SIG/M volume 209 (this disk also contains a complete COBOL compiler). CWEEP the MSDOS version is available on PC-BLUE volume 81. Copies of these disks are available from the **P D Software Library** for £2.00, or if you have a modem for 300/300 baud you can download NSWP from West London CBBS.

PUBLIC DOMAIN ACCESS POINTS!

P D Software Library, 138 Holtye Road, East Grinstead, Sussex, RH19 3EA
(0342) 313883

West London CBBS 300/300 (0895)420164 24hrs
West London TBBS 300/300 (0895)52685 24hrs

Next month we will take a look at some more utility programs including DU, the Public Domain disk editor program and how it can be used to recover erase disk files.

AN INTRODUCTION TO FORTH

FORTH is certainly a popular language. Whenever a new machine is launched there is a version of Forth available within months or even weeks. Elsewhere in this issue you will find two reviews for cassette versions of Forth recently released for the Amstrad but this article by PAUL GARDNER is intended to be a broad introduction to Forth, what it is and what you could get out of it.

Forth the language

First let me say that Forth is not just another language. The whole design of a Forth system is fundamentally different to traditional computer languages like BASIC or Pascal. As a language Forth begins with a powerful set of standard commands, it then provides the mechanism by which you can define your own commands. The structured process of building definitions upon previous definitions is Forth's equivalent of high-level coding. Alternatively, in many Forth systems words may be defined directly in assembler mnemonics using Forth's assembler.

The highest level of Forth code can resemble an English language description of the application. Forth can be used as a 'meta-language' — a language that you can use to create problem oriented languages.

The advantages of Forth

Forth is FAST! High level Forth executes much faster than interpreted BASIC on all micros that I have seen it working on, typically twenty or thirty times faster! If you need even more speed then the time-critical parts of your application can be written directly in assembler. This process is much easier in Forth than in most versions of BASIC.

Forth is compact. The pre-defined word set usually occupies less than 8K. Your application in its compiled form also takes up much less space than the equivalent code written in BASIC.

Forth is transportable. Almost all versions of Forth stick to one of two well defined standards, FIG-Forth or Forth 79. This means that applications written for one machine require very little alteration to work on another. It is possible to type programs (or applications as they are usually called) straight in from a wide variety of books and have them work first time, even when they were originally written for an entirely different machine.

The disadvantages of Forth

I have found that Forth is more difficult to master than other languages. The standard set of words that make up the Forth package you may buy has very many things missing. The standard Forth word-set very often has no words to handle strings, arrays, floating point numbers or trig functions. Forth provides the means by which all these missing elements can be added to the system but it is left to you to do it. Some versions of Forth come supplied with extra programs or listings, to provide these functions. It is the philosophy of Forth systems that only the essentials should be regarded as the core of the language and that you are responsible for the expansion of the system.

What makes up a Forth system

I will take you on a guided tour of a typical Forth system before I tell you about Forth from a user's point of view.

The Forth system can be viewed as three distinct parts:-

1. The dictionary
2. The keyboard interpreter
3. The stacks

The dictionary

The key component of a Forth system is the dictionary. As the name implies the dictionary is a list of words and with each word is a definition of what the word 'means' (or does). The dictionary expands as you define new words.

The keyboard interpreter

Forth is usually controlled from a keyboard device such as a VDU or your computer's keyboard. The input Forth expects from this device is simple:-

WORDS — SEPARATED BY SPACES!

and a word is any sequence of characters with a space at the end. More than one word may be typed on a single line but none of them are passed to the interpreter until the RETURN key is pressed. The words are passed to the interpreter in the order that they were typed and the interpreter then checks each word to see if it has been defined in the dictionary by searching it from top to bottom. If it has been defined then it is executed immediately. If the word is not found then the system attempts to interpret the word as a number which it then pushes on top of the Forth data stack. If the word hasn't been defined and cannot be interpreted as a number then an error message is printed. When the interpreter has executed a line of commands it prints OK on the screen, to let you know that it's ready for more.

The Stack

Forth uses a stack for holding temporary values during calculations and for passing values to and from words that require parameters.

The stack is a simple Last In — First Out structure, so normally values are removed in the reverse order to that in which they were placed on. There are various stack manipulation commands that let you change the order of the values on the stack. Should you try to remove more values from the stack than are present then an error message is printed. When a word requires one or more parameters, it expects to find them on the top of the stack. When the word is executed it removes its parameters from the top of the stack and returns the answer, if any, to the stack.

The use of the stack for temporary storage increases processing speed considerably. For example the word + (plus) expects to find two values on the stack which it removes, then adds together and returns the answer to the stack. So if you wanted to know the answer to the sum 6 + 11 you would type:-

```
6 11 + . <return>
```

and the computer would print the answer on the next line:-

```
17 OK
```

I will explain the details of the actions performed by the machine during this calculation, as this describes much of the Forth system in general.

When you press the return key, this indicates that a line of commands is to be processed. The Forth system looks at the words one at a time and acts according to them: eg for the above line:

6	a number so it is put on the stack
11	a number so it is put on the stack
+	a defined word, so it executes it ie take the top two values off the stack add them together, put the answer back on the stack
.	a defined word (dot), this takes the number that is on the top of the stack and prints its value on the screen.

Note that the operator (+) follows the two values in the input line. This is because the

stack is being used and the values must be on the stack before the operator is used. This may appear difficult to get used to but it is one of the fundamentals of the language that makes it so fast. If you compare this with the method that BASIC uses to interpret the line **PRINT 6+11** you can see that the Forth system is much simpler and thus faster.

The form of notation that Forth uses is called reverse polish notation. This simply means that the operators must follow the operands that they will work on.

For example in BASIC—

PRINT 8+14*(2+4)

would be written in Forth as—

24 + 14 * 8 + .

— if we assume the normal rules of precedence for the BASIC expression. This expression could also be written in Forth—

8 14 2 4 + * + .

as once all the numbers have been placed on the stack, the operators are executed in the order that they were typed in.

Defining simple words

Having hopefully laid the groundwork I will now explain how Forth allows you to create variables, constants, structures etc, and ultimately a working program.

Each version of Forth comes complete with a set of predefined words. Many of these defined words allow you to execute the instruction direct from the keyboard, for example the words + (plus) and . (pronounced dot).

+ takes two items off the stack and returns to the stack one answer. A useful notation is used to describe the stack action within brackets after the word referred to, for example:

(n,	m	n+m)
operand second from top of stack	operand on top of stack	result on top of stack

when listing either the operands or the results, the top of the stack comes last in the list.

The power of the Forth system is the ability to extend the dictionary by adding new words. These new words are defined in terms of the Forth words already present in the dictionary. For example, there is no word in Forth to square the number on the stack. This can be defined by typing in:-

: SQUARE DUP * ; <return>

When the return key is pressed the keyboard interpreter executes the first word (:) which tells the computer to compile the rest of the input buffer and any further input until the word ; is reached.

The word SQUARE may now be used from the keyboard, or from within another, yet to be defined, word, for example:

SQUARE . <return>
prints:- 4 OK

e.g. A new word to square a number and then print out the result:-

: SQUAREPRINT SQUARE . ;

Note that you can use long and meaningful

[redacted]

names for the words that you define. The stack effect of SQUARE is (n-n*n) but the stack effect of SQUAREPRINT is (n-)

The colon compiler, as it is called, when initiated by the word : compiles all the following input into the dictionary in the form of a list of dictionary addresses for the words contained within : . . . . . . ; except for the first word which is compiled as the title of the word. (This is not quite the full story but it will do for now).

To summarise, it is possible to define new words which will become part of the dictionary by describing them in terms of words currently in the dictionary. You can include in these new words, comments, numbers and text, which are compiled slightly differently, for example:

```
: PAGECOUNT ( n-n+1)
  ." This is the end of page"
     DUP .
  ." the next page will be page" 1 + DUP .
;
```

Comments are enclosed within brackets but there must be at least one space after the first bracket. Text strings that are to be printed are enclosed by the Forth word ." (pronounced dot-quote) and a closing quote. Again there must be a space between the dot-quote and the first character of the string or the interpreter will not be able to recognise the Forth word dot-quote. Numbers can be included anywhere in a definition. When the newly defined word is executed the value of the number is put on the stack.

Constants and Variables

As you can see it is simple to define a new word in terms of the old ones present in the dictionary and it is also simple to allocate storage space for constants and variables within the dictionary. For example **0 VARIABLE COUNT** encloses in the dictionary a single length integer which will from now on be referred to as COUNT. If the word COUNT is now typed into the input buffer or executed by another word it will leave the address of its memory location on top of the stack.

There are a few useful words in Forth for use with variables:-

♦ (address - contents of address), pronounced 'fetch'
! (number, address -), pronounced 'store'

So **4 COUNT** ! sets the variable COUNT to 4 and **COUNT** ♦ puts the contents of count on the stack.

Constants (which are not available in BASIC) are handled a little differently. They are initialised in a similar way to variables, for example **12 CONSTANT DOZEN**. In this case when the word DOZEN is executed it does not leave an address on the stack but instead leaves the contents of the address that represents the constant, so **DOZEN .** prints the value of the constant, ie **12 OK**.

A number could be stored in the dictionary by using the colon compiler:-

: DOZEN 12 ;

which when executed would leave the value 12 on the stack, but CONSTANT and VARIABLE work much quicker, are easier to use and take up less space.

How numbers are stored

Most often the values which reside in memory or on the stack are referred to as single length integers. Each number takes up two bytes of memory and is stored in twos complement form. So the range of numbers available is from −32768 to +32767.

In many cases a number which is on the stack is needed by an operator whose operands may only be positive, for example, ♦ and ! can logically only access positive value memory locations. This allows the user to address all areas from 0 to 64K from within a Forth program.

There are also various operators which assume that the top entry (or entries) on the stack represent unsigned integers, for example **U.** (unsigned print) or **U<** (unsigned less than)

Standard versions of Forth contain a limited number of operators which can handle double length integers. The few operators provided are sufficient to enable the user to define new operators to extend the double length word set.

Forth does not traditionally provide the user with floating point number routines. This is again part of the Forth philosophy, as most calculations can be performed using integers that have been scaled appropriately. Many versions of Forth do provide additional words for handling floating point numbers but you should realise that floating point calculations are significantly slower than integer ones.

Structures for decision making and repeating

Many versions of BASIC only provide the GOTO, GOSUB, IF—THEN and FOR—NEXT structures to control the flow of execution in a program, although many recent versions include structures such as WHILE—WEND, REPEAT—UNTIL etc.

Forth provides a host of control structures to make program design easier and also gives you the ability to create your own structures by adding words to the 'compiler' within Forth. Four standard structures are available but the appearance of these is a little unusual when compared to languages like BASIC.

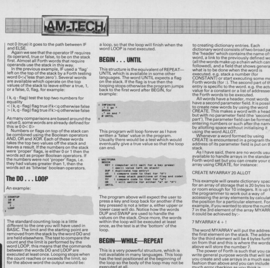
IF—ELSE—ENDIF

Here is a program to print a number off the stack followed by the word "Debit" or "Credit" depending whether it is positive or negative.

```
: BALANCE ( n -)
DUP ABS . 0<
IF
  ( if balance is negative)
  ." Debit"
ELSE
  ( if balance is positive)
  ." Credit"
ENDIF
;
```

IF makes a decision between two paths, one from IF to ELSE, and the other from ELSE to ENDIF. The paths join up again after ENDIF.

IF bases its decision on the number on the top of the stack (which it then discards), so this number is the 'condition'. If the condition is 0 (false) it goes to the path between ELSE and ENDIF. If the condition is



not 0 (true) it goes to the path between IF and ELSE.

Again we see that the operator IF requires its operand, true or false, to be on the stack first. Almost all Forth words that require operands use the stack in this way.

In the previous example, IF used a 'flag' left on the top of the stack by a Forth testing word 0<('less than zero'). Several words are available which operate on the top values of the stack to leave either a true, 1, or a false, 0, flag, for example:

(k, q - flag) test the top two numbers for equality
< (k, q - flag) flag true if k<q otherwise false
> (k, q - flag) flag true if k>q otherwise false

As many comparisons are based around the value 0, some words are already defined for this ie 0 0< 0>

Numbers or flags on top of the stack can be combined using the Boolean operators AND, OR and XOR. Each of these words takes the top two values off the stack and leaves a result. If the numbers on the stack were 'proper' flags, ie either 0 or 1 then the words act as proper Boolean operators. If the numbers were not 'proper' flags, i.e. they had values greater than 1, then the words act as 'bitwise' boolean operators.

The DO . . . LOOP

An example:

```
: COUNTUP
  10 0
  DO
    I .
  LOOP
;
```

The standard counting loop is a little different to the one you will have used in BASIC. The limit and the starting point are removed from the stack by the word DO and are held elsewhere. The test to compare the count and the limit is performed by the word LOOP, this means that the commands between the words DO and LOOP are executed at least once. Looping stops when the count reaches or exceeds the limit, so for the above word the output would be:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 OK

The Forth word **I** is responsible for getting the current vale of the count and putting it on the stack. If you nest one loop within another there is another word **J** which will return the value of the outer loop to the stack.

If you want the loop to count in steps greater than one a word **+LOOP** is available:

```
: COUNTUPINTWOS
  10 0 DO
    I .        ( print count)
  2 +LOOP
;
```

The word **+LOOP** takes a value off the stack and adds this to the count for the loop before comparingthe counter to the limit value. In this way the loop could be made to count down by adding a negative number to the count, for example:

-2 +LOOP

There is NO equivalent of GOTO in Forth, (thank goodness!) so you cannot jump out of loops etc. There is a Forth word LEAVE which sets the counter equal to the limit for a loop, so that the loop will finish when the word LOOP is next executed.

BEGIN . . . UNTIL

This structure is the equivalent of REPEAT—UNTIL which is available in some other languages. The word UNTIL expects a flag on the stack. If the flag is true then the looping stops otherwise the program jumps back to the first word after BEGIN, for example:

```
: INFINITE
  ." I go "
  BEGIN
  ." on and "
  0 UNTIL
;
```

This program will loop forever as I have written a 'false' value in the program. Usually there would be a test which would eventually give a true value so that the loop can end.

```
: WAITFORA
  BEGIN
    KEY ( computer will wait for a key press)
        ( ascii value left on stack)
    DUP ( duplicate top entry)
    65  ( compare code to that for "A")
    SWAP  ( swap stack positions of flag and code)
    97  ( compare code to that for "a")
    OR    ( will settle for either "a" or "A")
  UNTIL
;
```

The program above will expect the user to press a key and loop back for another if the key pressed is not a letter a, either upper or lower case will do. Notice how the words DUP and SWAP are used to handle the values on the stack. Once more, the words within the loop will be executed at least once, as the test is at the 'bottom' of the loop.

BEGIN—WHILE—REPEAT

This is a very powerful structure, which is not available in many languages. This loop has the test positioned at the beginning of the loop so the body of the loop may not be executed at all.

Example; this program waits for the same key to be pressed as above but will keep count of the number of attempts you make before you get it right.

```
: WAITFORA ( wait for key A or a to be pressed)
  0 COUNT !   ( COUNT is a previously defined variable)
  BEGIN
    KEY
    DUP 65  SWAP 97  OR NOT
    WHILE ( i.e. while you haven't got it right)
      COUNT @ 1+ COUNT !  ( add one to count)
      ." You are supposed to press the letter A, dummy!"
  REPEAT
  COUNT @ DUP
  IF
    ." You got it wrong" . ." times"
  ELSE
    DROP ." Right first time!"
  ENDIF
;
```

Although the programs above do not achieve much they demonstrate a lot of the fundamental control structures available within Forth.

Inside the dictionary

When a word is defined, its definition is put in the dictionary. So far the dictionary entries we have written have been produced using the colon compiler or were CONSTANTS or VARIABLES. Forth is not limited to these three forms when it comes to creating dictionary entries. Each dictionary word consists of two broad parts, the 'header' which contains the name of the word, a link to the previously defined word (all the words make up a chain which can be followed), and a field that shows generally what is to be done when the word is executed. e.g. stack a number (for CONSTANT) or start executing some more Forth words (for :). The second part of the entry is specific to the word, e.g. the actual value for a constant or a list of addresses of the Forth words to be executed.

All words have a header, most words have a second parameter field. It is possible to create new words by using the word CREATE. This makes a word with a header but with no parameter field (the 'second part'). The parameter field can be formed by entering numbers or such after the name or by allotting space without initialising it using the word ALLOT.

Whenever a word formed by using CREATE is encountered in a program the address of its parameter field is put on the stack.

As I have said, there are no words usually available to handle arrays in the standard Forth word set but you can create your own array using CREATE, for instance:

CREATE MYARRAY 20 ALLOT

This example will create dictionary space for an array of storage that is 20 bytes long, or room enough for 10 integers. It is up to the programmer to work out a way of accessing the array elements by calculating the position for a particular element. For example, if you wanted to store the number 7 in the 3rd element of the array MYARRAY it could be achieved by:-

7 MYARRAY 4 + !

The word MYARRAY will put the address of the first element on the stack. The address for the third element will be 4 bytes further on from that and this is where the words above will store the number 7.

The power of Forth is such that you can write general purpose words that will let you create and use arrays in a much easier fashion than above and you can include as much error checking as you think is necessary. For instance, while you are developing a program you may want to make sure you don't try to use an element of an array that does not exist. When your application is fully tested and working you can delete all the error checking parts of your words, this will make the application run faster and in less space.

Most versions of Forth now available come with extra code or listings for things like strings and arrays, this should make it easier for you to develop larger programs without initially getting bogged down in the tiny details.

Some final points

So far I have only written about Forth in general terms and I have deliberately left out any mention of how Forth programs are written and how they are stored to tape or disk. To understand Forth beyond this point means that you actually need to have a version for your machine. Learning Forth is a bit like learning chess, it is easy to understand and learn the rules but the only way to be any good at it is to play the game. In this issue there are two reviews for versions of Forth that are now available for the Amstrad. I hope you buy one and begin to explore.

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BENCHTESTS

A standard file of 775 words (4,785 characters) was used to carry out the following benchtests (all timings are in seconds):

	PROTEXT	TASWORD/AMSWORD
1 LOAD text file	4.7	10.2
2 SAVE text file	4.9	18.9
3 Re-FORMAT paragraph (85 words)	0.4	15.3
4 Re-FORMAT entire text	2.5	Not Possible
5 Move directly to start of text	under 0.1	2.2
6 Move directly to end of text	0.2	2.2
7 REPLACE 'the' with 'THE' (45 occurances)	1.7	34.1
8 SCAN entire text	2.2	7.2
9 MERGE file to centre of text	4.0	Not Possible
10 MERGE file to end of text	3.8	12.4
11 MOVE 85-word paragraph	under 0.1	6.8
12 PROGRAM LOAD TIME DISC / ROM	12.9 / Instant	14.6 / Not Available

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FIND and REPLACE – Wildcards, all or part of text, case specific, whole word or part of word, find control codes.
Block commands – Move/copy/delete/save/print/format.
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Forth on the Amstrad

This is review of two versions of Forth that are currently available for the Amstrad CPC 464, KUMA FORTH from Kuma Computers Ltd. and Abersoft's FIG-FORTH released by Amsoft. Both versions are intended for the cassette based machine.

Most Forth systems are standard and as such appear almost identical in operation, it is the 'frills' provided that make any one version either liked or disliked when compared to another.

Forth is a language designed primarily for a computer that uses disk drives, or some other form of random access, mass storage device. This means that cassette based versions have got to 'pretend' to have a disk drive of sorts. How successful this is depends on the version you have but in general some area of memory is set aside to perform as a disk would.

The editor

Forth programs can be typed in directly on the keyboard and compiled one line at a time. However, this is very error prone and impractical for definitions longer than a few words. Forth systems provide an editor that lets you compose text onto 'screens'. The screens of text can then be compiled by the system, as if they were typed directly at the keyboard. Each Forth screen is actually a 1K byte block of memory. This is viewed by the editor as a text space of 16 lines of 64 characters. When a screen has been written it can be saved to disk and a previously stored screen can be recalled from disk into memory.

On a proper disk-based Forth system, whenever a screen is needed it is loaded from disk by the system. Different cassette versions get around this problem by various means.

Kuma Forth

Kuma Forth comes on cassette accompanied by an impressive 120 page manual. The Forth system loads and runs as usual by typing RUN" on the Amstrad. The Forth system loads in just over three minutes, this is worth noting as it is very easy to completely crash a Forth system and it needs reloading after each crash.

Kuma Forth is a fairly standard implementation of FIG-Forth (Forth Interest Group — Forth), although there are many additions to the standard word set.

The first thing of note is that all the usual commands like **vlist** etc, seem not to be understood by the system at first. This is because the Forth keyboard interpreter is fussy about upper or lower case characters, so the first thing to do is turn caps lock on!

Kuma Forth gets around the problem of not having a disk drive by using a cassette tape for mass storage of screens. You need to use the command **FORMAT** to prepare a blank tape for the system to use. Format actually prepares sixteen 1K byte blocks on the tape which are initially blank. Whenever a screen is needed by the system, or whenever you want to save a screen to tape, you are prompted to load the tape and press the PLAY or RECORD buttons appropriately. The system locates the correct position on the tape to either read or write the particular screen. Now while this may sound very slow and complicated it actually works quite well. The reason it does, is that when you load a screen of text from tape it is held in an area of memory called a BLOCK-BUFFER. On the Kuma version there are sixteen of these and each is capable of holding one screen of text. So you could write 16K of text, using the editor, and all the information is held within the memory. The stored information is only written to tape when you issue a command like **FLUSH**. This command writes to tape any blocks of information that are currently being held in memory, BUT it only writes to tape those blocks that have been changed since they were last loaded! So if you were to load a large number of blocks from tape but you only altered one of them, then only the altered one would be saved back to tape.

The Kuma Forth allows you to format tapes to store more than 16 screen of text but it is probably simpler to have a collection of short tapes, rather than a C120 formatted to hold dozens.

This clever use of the tape allows you, for example, to load from one tape sixteen screens of text, which could then be compiled and then load more screens from another tape. The systems uses some of the block buffers to load the new information but often, only the least recently used block and certainly not one that has been altered but has not yet been written to tape. Because of this you have to make sure that you save all the updated blocks to tape before you leave the Forth system, or you will lose the recent changes.

The Kuma Forth tape contains 16 screens of text which come after the main Forth program. Some of these screens contain useful additions to the language and you can load them into the buffers, to list or compile them.

To load any one screen into a buffer you simply need to issue a command to LIST the contents, for example the command **2 LIST** makes the system fetch screen two from the tape and list it on the computer's screen. If you type the command again, the screen is listed automatically, without having to be fetched again as it is already in one of the buffers.

To fetch all the screens on the tape supplied you can define a Forth word like : **LISTALL 17 1 DO I LIST LOOP ;**

If you now type LISTALL as a command, the system fetches and lists screens 1 to 16 from the tape and they are all held in the memory buffers.

The reason I keep referring to screens being 'fetched' and not 'loaded' is that the word LOAD has a different meaning in Forth.

Some of the screens supplied with the Kuma system are simply text screens to be read. Some of the screens, though, contain Forth definitions which can be added to the dictionary. For example screen two contains a few handy additions to the dictionary, these words can be compiled by using the command **2 LOAD**, this fetches screen two from tape (if it is not already in one of the buffers) and compiles all the text in the screen as if you had typed it from the keyboard.

The (non)standard Forth

Kuma Forth when first loaded from the tape contains a few built-in additions to the FIG-Forth standard. It provides a complete set of words to handle floating-point numbers as well as the usual one for single and double-length integers.

One of the most useful facilities is the editor. The standard Forth line editor which is, to be blunt, pitiful, considering the sort of machine that the language has been implemented on, is provided. Line editors may have been all that was available on early mainframes but now they should be considered a thing of the past! All Forth systems provide a line editor because it is specified in the standard. Kuma Forth though, also provides a 'full screen editor'. By that I means one that lists a 1K screen of text on your computer screen and lets you drive a cursor about all over it, like a moderately good word processor. The editor makes sure that you can't have lines longer than 64 characters, or more than 16 lines.

As well as the 'built in' extras, the 16 supporting screens provide some very useful additions to the language. The most useful screens are described here. Screen 2 provides a couple of Forth definitions for words that let you allocate strings to the function keys. So if you want the word VLIST (vocabulary list) to be executed whenever you press key F0 you can achieve this by first typing **128 EXECUTES VLIST**. On the CPC 464 this assigns the string to the number 0 on the numeric keypad.

Screen 3 offers some extra words to provide a real-time clock. This internal clock can be set and prints the current time from the keyboard7 or from within a Forth definition.

Screens 4 and 5 hold a list of error messages. Usually if you make a detectable mistake, Forth will print a useful message like, VLUST? MSG $0, whenever you misspell VLIST. If you fetch screens 4 and 5 into memory and execute the instruction **1 WARNING** ! then the system prints more helpful error messages. So, for the above mistake it would print VLUST? UNRECOGNISED INPUT.

Screens 6, 7 and 8 provide a collection of useful words for creating and manipulating strings. String handling is not part of the standard Forth system, you have to define your own words for that. The collection of words provided is not intended to be the only way, simply a suggestion. You have the facilities in Forth to create words to handle strings, just like your favourite language (BASIC, Pascal, etc) would.

The manual that accompanies the language seems to skimp a bit on its discussion of how you might use the words they provide. It is typical of Forth manuals to begin 'This manual is not intended to be a tutorial of FORTH. . . .' and then go on to tell you which book to buy. Whether you agree with this attitude depends very much on how much the language has cost you already.

Screen 9 of the extensions provided, lets you create words

in the dictionary that contain machine-code routines. This could be so that you have a very fast word, or it could be that you require access to the lowest levels of the machine itself.

Screen 10 provides ready written definitions for the creation and use of one and two-dimensional arrays. These definitions are actually written in numeric machine code and execute very quickly! The arrays they can create do not, however, include any checks to see if you are trying to access an element that is not suppose to exist.

Screen 11 provides words to let you access the RS232 interface hardware, if you have one.

Screens 12 and 13 provide graphics handling words and finally, Screens 14-16 give extensive definitions for the use of the sound facilities on the Amstrad.

Abersoft's FIG-Forth

Abersoft have had a very successful version of Forth available for the Spectrum for a few years now and it is a traditional version of FIG-Forth with few surprises.

The Forth cassette comes with a much slimmer manual than the Kuma version, about 60 pages and the information presented in the manual is fairly terse. Abersoft Forth also uses memory to act as a 'disk' but in a slightly different way. The RAM-DISC, as they refer to it, occupies 11K bytes of memory, this is room enough to hold eleven 1K screens. Unlike the Kuma version this Forth also uses a system of block-buffers separate from this memory area. In this way the Forth system uses its RAM-disk and block buffers just like any disk-based Forth system would, except that the 'disk' provided has a maximum space of 11 screens. At the end of every session you use a command, **SAVET**, to save the entire RAM-disk image to tape (as if you were making a backup of a disk). Another command, **LOADT**, allows you to load the contents of a tape into the RAM-disk space. This arrangement is more akin to a true Forth system but there appears to be only one block buffer.

Abersoft Forth provides the standard line-editor and it also provides a much more useful screen editor. This Forth provides access to the graphics capability of the Amstrad by a number of built-in words. The most noticeable addition to this Forth is that it supports a full Z80 assembler, one that recognises mnemonics, although the appearance of reverse-polish assembly language is enough to make you shudder.

Unfortunately, Abersoft Forth does not include additional screens that you can list and load, which is a pity, because it is helpful to see how Forth listings are supposed to appear before you start on your own.

One of the best facilities in Abersoft Forth (not provided by Kuma) is that if you add words to the dictionary that you would like to be included 'as standard' whenever you load the system, then you can do this. It is straightforward and well described in the manual how to save an extended dictionary, which you can in future use as your 'master' version.

Conclusion

Both Abersoft and Kuma Forth are available on either tape or disk. If you have a disk drive then you must go for the disk version as it transforms the whole language. If you'd like to try Forth on a cassette based system then either of these two versions should suit. Each package has some advantages and some disadvantages. The Kuma version provides many more extensions to the standard language than the Abersoft version does but it does not include an assembler. I think the Abersoft way of managing the RAM-disk is preferable but it limits you to a 'virtual memory' of just 11 screens. The Abersoft manual is really only a technical reference manual whereas the Kuma manual is fuller and better presented. Enough comparisons!

Both systems have one thing in common, at £19.95 for the Kuma Forth and £24.95 for Abersoft's Forth (for the cassette versions) they are both surprisingly overpriced. The Abersoft Forth must have been fairly easily converted from the Spectrum, and it is expensive compared to the Kuma version.

Language packages like these may not appeal to the mass games market but they are trivial compared to the complexity of modern games software.

Paul Gardner

THE MOUSETRAP

The mousetrap has sprung! The Amstrad computer has finally caught up with the mouse craze. In fact, Advanced Memory Systems Ltd have snatched at the bait and are offering Amstrad users the fashionable cursor transport device for graphical design work and menu option selection. The package contains the AMX MOUSE, the AMX MOUSE INTERFACE and the AMX MOUSE software which includes AMX CONTROL, AMX ART, ICON DESIGNER and PATTERN DESIGNER either in cassette or in disk form. Also included is the AMX MOUSE manual which contains all the breeding habits of this species.

As it goes, the mouse is a very small and cute little house pet. The owner hand grips the mouse with ease and the 'subcompact' mouse requires little training ground for its daily run. It features three control



keys positioned at the front of the unit, operated comfortably by the three middle fingers of the controlling hand. The buttons are configured as EXECUTE, MOVE and CANCEL operators under the default setting of AMX CONTROL. The AMX MOUSE INTERFACE has the same stature as the mouse and connects up via a D type connector to the Amstrad joystick port. A short power lead intercepts the monitor lead to provide unlimited mouse-power. The tail or leash of the mouse is very flexible and plugs via a 20 way 0.1" pitch connector into the AMX MOUSE INTERFACE and provides enough operating radius or range for even the dottiest screen creations.

The mouse design is conventional and extremely well thought out. A heavy steel ball transmits the rotation to x and y shafts running in miniature ball race bearings. Mechanical movement is transmitted into electrical signals via optical sensors, whose LED light beams are broken by a disk with etched slots on its circumference. This provides (in conjunction with a static mask) a shutter effect, which generates clean on/off signals from the phototransistor outputs. Each axis requires two phase shifted signals, so that the sense of direction may be established by the resident software. These signals toggle latches within the interface which provide direction signals on the joystick input port.

The software checks the direction signals and counts the movement signals up or down, thus incrementing or decrementing software counters which keep track of the x and y movement of the mouse. Thus the two software counters provide at any time the current x and y coordinates of the mouse controlled pointer. AMX CONTROL performs this task. It must initially be installed from cassette by typing RUN"AMX. Two modes of operation are available. The default setting maintains the update of the software counters for x and y position of the cursor. By using **IMCRSR**, the mouse can be configured to run as a joystick by creating a cursor key code. This allows the mouse to be used with existing commercial software such as TASWORD. The only problem is that AMX CONTROL or its workspace may be overwritten by the application software. To this purpose AMS offer AMX CONTROL in ROM format. The three control buttons, which on default act as RETURN, COPY and DELETE, may be configured within AMX CONTROL to simulate different sets of keys to accommodate the various existing programs.

AMX CONTROL provides extended Basic functions accessed with a 'I' command or directly from machine code with the help of the system call information provided in the Amstrad manual. AMX CONTROL provides all the facilties to run the mouse and to maintain an icon and window driven user environment.

IBUTTONS,*n* enables the mouse buttons to simulate keys on the keyboard. Apart from the default setting there are 5 combinations to choose from.
IDESK clears the screen to the grey desktop pattern.
IGCRSR,*gx,gy* places the graphics coordinates of the mouse into the variables signified by gx and gy.
IHIDEPOINTER removes the pointer from the screen.
IICON,*nl,x,yl* is the command used to display any of the 64 available icons on the screen at any given coordinate. The icon size is 2 x 2 character squares.
ILOAD, *f$* loads in user defined icons previously generated with ICON DESIGNER.
IMCRSR,*c* enables or disables the cursor/joystick simulation routines within AMX CONTROL.
IMOUSE,*c* enables or disables the AMX MOUSE.
IMOVEPOINTER moves the pointer to a new mouse location (non destructive removal of old pointer location).
IPOINTER,*n* changes the icon used as a pointer.
ISTEP,*sx(,sy)* sets the step size of the mouse movement in x and y direction. The value range is 0 to 128.
ISHOWPOINTER displays the pointer at the current graphics coordinates. It can also be used to drop chosen icons on the screens.
ITCRSR,*tx,ty* returns the current text coordinates of the mouse into variables signified by tx and ty.
IWINDOW,*sn,lx,by,rx,ty* [,*t$*] creates a window on the screen. The window has a shaded border similar to you know-what-program. If t$ is specified, a title contained in t$ is printed centrally at the top of the window with a line beneath. The window is created similar to that available in Basic. Printing to the window is done by specifying the stream, PRINT # sn,'That's how'.

ICON DESIGNER is a separate program enabling the user to design his or her own icons. Up to 320 icons can be designed at one time. Naturally ICON DESIGNER is mouse and icon driven. On loading the complete work area is displayed. On the left there is a 16 x 16 character design grid for the 16 x 16 pixel icon. Each pixel is toggled black or white with the EXECUTE button. On the lower right, the icon is displayed in original size. The finished icon can be picked up and dropped into the waste bin, the 5 x 5 icon scratch pad for intermediate storage or directly to the icon file area, where the current 32 icon file is displayed. Loading and saving the icon files is executed by pointing the disk icon.

PATTERN DESIGNER is virtually identical to the ICON DESIGNER and allows you to create design patterns for later use in AMX ART. The pattern design area is split into four quarters and each quarter is a 8 x 8 grid. Three quarters are symmetrical copies of the design quarter, so that the pattern can be designed to be continuous and symmetrical.

AMX ART is the graphics utility which shows off the AMX MOUSE abilities. AMX ART is mouse and icon driven, has pull-down window menus and is the closest thing to you-know-what-program for the Amstrad. AMX ART requires AMX CONTROL to be installed. The screen contains 4 major menu titles at the top, which, when approached with the mouse cursor, automatically pull down their drawers (if you pardon the expression!) to reveal all the list of available options. The options are selected by running the pointer up or down the list and pressing EXECUTE, when the correct option is highlighted. On the righthand side the Mode and Spray size section is displayed. The window can be scrolled up or down by use of the scroll icons at the top and bottom to gain access to all options.

Only one drawing mode may be selected at any one time with any of the available spray sizes. The lefthand of the screen contains the PATTERN WINDOW, which again can be scrolled up or down. There are 32 patterns, seven of which are in the display window. The selected pattern is displayed in the PATTERN DISPLAY BOX at the bottom left of the screen. The FILE MENU contains all the options related to input and output.
LOAD PICT loads picture from tape or disk.
SAVE PICT saves a created picture to tape or disk.
PRINT reveals a second pull-down menu for the selection of the EPSON-FX or AMSTRAD DMP-1 printer. For the DMP-1 option the screen will be printed in a x1 format, in the EPSON option in a x2.5 format.
LOAD FILLS loads a selected pattern file created with PATTERN DESIGNER.
The OPTIONS MENU contains various systems options.
CLEAR clears the screen after positive confirmation.
GRIDLOCK provides an aid to technical drawings by locking the pen movement to within specified grid increments. These can be set for x1, x2, x4, x8, x16 pixels.

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TASPRINT 464 The Style Writer

A must for dot-matrix printer owners! Print your program output and listings in a choice of five impressive print styles. TASPRINT 464 utilises the graphics capabilities of dot-matrix printers to form, with a double pass of the printhead, output in a range of five fonts varying from the futuristic DATA-RUN to the hand-writing style of PALACE SCRIPT. TASPRINT 464 drives the dot-matrix printers listed below and can be used to print AMSWORD/TASWORD 464 text files. TASPRINT 464 gives your output originality and style. Completely compatible with the 664.

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Typical Tasprint output. Please note that different makes of printer produce different sized output.

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SPEED changes the rate of movement of the pointer and with it the pixel sensitivity (fast, medium and slow).
SPRAY GUN MODE On selection any of the 12 spray sizes may be set. Spraying will produce the pattern selected from the pattern file. For freehand drawing the small dot size spray imitates a pencil. Spraying is only accomplished by copying the pattern design within the spray size area on the screen and not by spraying individual random dots. This means that the spray gun cannot be used to vary the amount of ink by repeatedly spraying the same area.
RUBBER MODE erases the screen within the spray area.
PAINT ROLLER MODE paints the required pattern in paint roller fashion.
FILL MODE fills with the selected pattern.
FRAME BOX MODE draws a rectangle after selecting with the crosshair pointer the two diagonal corners (rubber banding possible).
FILLED BOX MODE operates similarily but fills the rectangle.
CIRCLE MODE provides a crosshair for setting the centrepoint of the circle. The cursor is set to the desired radius and the MOVE button pressed. A temporary dotted/dashed circle is drawn. This can be repeated several times until EXECUTE finalises the desired circle.
TEXT MODE sets the pointer to the letter I, which can be used for positioning the text. Pressing EXECUTE fixes the start position and the text may be entered.

AMX ART is an excellent graphics package to show off the virtues of the mouse. Positioning the pointer fast and accurately with mouse is no problem on the correct table surface. The choice of an ideal surface is important for the accurate and repeated positioning of the cursor and extended experimentation with different materials is worthwhile.

The MOUSE is superior to a lightpen when comparing the ergonomics and accuracy of positioning, but the difference in price should be taken into consideration when making comparisons. 'Mousing' requires physical training. The user will be driving several miles in the course of a screen design, while chasing and catching a multitude of icons, opening pull-down menus etc . . .
The only system to knock spots off the mouse is a digitising/graphics tablet, but with existing price levels this is quite beside the point. In the meantime it's back to squeezing mice, rolling down menus and chasing icons . . .
PENCIL MODE I To draw a line, the mouse has to be moved to the starting point while keeping the MOVE button depressed. Upon release a rubber line will follow the pencil until the EXECUTE button is pressed which freezes the line permanently. For free hand drawing, the EXECUTE button can be kept continually depressed.
COPY copies one screen area to another with the use of a copy box area. This designated area may be moved around the screen and copied to the desired location.
The TEXT MENU provides the setting of four printing parameters, PLAIN, BOLD, VERY BOLD and ITALIC. Up to six combinations are possible.
The LINES MENU allows various forms of line drawing and filling to be selected.
BLACK provides lines and boxes to be drawn in black, filled boxes filled with black.
INVERT allows inverted lines or inverted filled boxes.
WHITE provides lines or boxes to be drawn in white or filled in white.

The MODE ICONS require little explanation.

Product: AMX MOUSE
Manufacturer: Advanced Memory Systems Ltd.
Price: £69.95 (inc postage)

Franco Frey

ASSEMBLING IN A SINGLE PASS

After learning the most efficient methods for compiling tea bags in a teapot, our very own (no one else would have him) GARY LIDDON takes a close look at a single pass Assembler from HEWSON CONSULTANTS.

Zapp is not a popular Commodore magazine (well it is but you need two z's and one p if you're going to spell it properly). *Zapp* is a Z80 assembly programming package. Written by **Keith Prosser**, converter of *Dragontorc* for the Amstrad, 3Zapp contains an editor, assembler and monitor and sets out to provide a complete code writing environment in a one load program.

The assembler is of the now rare, one pass variety. This means it creates the object code in one assembly pass only. On old one pass assemblers you would find the program usually came across some problems during assembly time, when it tried to turn a statement containing a label not yet defined, into code. For example, if you had the line **JP LOOP** and the label LOOP was further on in your code, the assembler wouldn't be able to cope, since it wouldn't know what LOOP equalled until it reached it in the listing and assembled it. The solution came in the form of a two pass assembler. On the first pass the program compiles all the code and makes notes on what the labels equal. The second pass fills in all the labels making the code complete.

Zapp is one pass but cleverly gets round the forward reference problems. The method employed is not foolproof and will sometimes give you an error message but the manual fully documents the shortcomings and suggests methods for avoiding such problems. The advantage with one pass assembly is the speed in which it can compile code — it's very fast indeed. But I feel a two pass assembler, with all its advantages, should have been used.

The assembler gets its input from the editor in which you create your listing. The editor expects the commands in a **LABEL, MNEMONIC, COMMENT** format. The label and comment are purely optional and are down to your discretion. The editor gets its input from a command line at the bottom of the screen. You type in a line and it appears in the listing at the top of the screen. It's all very similar to the editor used by our friend the Spectrum. In the listing is a cursor you can move up and down with the relevant cursor keys. Type a line of mnemonics in the lower window and the editor inserts it at the cursor and renumbers the rest of the pro gram. As you type statements they are automatically error checked before they go into the listing. If you need to edit a previous line you move the cursor on the top listing to the line to be changed and then press **COPY**, to copy into the editing line. **RETURN** replaces the altered statement. As you type your program into the editor the listing is automatically formatted.

All the standard pseudo-ops are provided including facilities to put place bytes, words and text at the program counter. Using **ORG** you can set the start address of the code and using the **FILE** command enables you to assemble from disk or tape. No binary option is provided but both hex, decimal and ASCII are provided. Having no binary function can be a bit awkward and an option should have been provided.

While in the command line, a number of direct commands are available to you. These



FEATURES/ FUNCTIONS	ESP	dk'tronics	Any Other
SINGLE COMPLETE ON SCREEN MENU	YES	NO	
DRAG SCREEN OBJECTS	YES	NO	
FLIP SCREEN OBJECTS	YES	NO	
CURSOR REMOVAL	YES	NO	
ELASTIC BOXES	YES	YES	
ELASTIC LINE	YES	YES	
ELASTIC TRIANGLE	YES	NO	
ELASTIC ELLIPSE	YES	NO	
ELASTIC DIAMOND	YES	NO	
ELASTIC POLYGON	YES	NO	
ELASTIC HEXAGON	YES	NO	
ELASTIC OCTAGON	YES	NO	
ELASTIC CUBE	YES	NO	
ELASTIC PYRAMID	YES	NO	
CIRCLES	YES	YES	
SOLID CIRCLES	YES	NO	
SOLID BOXES	YES	NO	
SOLID ELLIPSES	YES	NO	
WEDGES	YES	NO	
BEZIER SIMULATIONS	YES	NO	
ZOOM EDIT	YES	YES	
REVERSE/MIRROR IMAGES	YES	NO	
REFERENCE BACKGROUND	YES	NO	
GRID BACKGROUND	YES	NO	
X,Y DISPLAY OPTION	YES	NO	
PAINT FILL	YES	YES	
COLOUR WASHING	YES	NO	
RESIDENT SCREEN DUMP	YES	NO	
3D EDGE PLOTTING	YES	NO	
TEXT	YES	YES	
9 BRUSH SIZES	YES	NO	
18 SPRAY NOZZLES	YES	NO	
4 BASIC TEXTURES	YES	NO	
TEXTURE VARIATION	YES	NO	
XOR TEXTURE SHADING	YES	NO	
RESIDENT SYMBOL/SHAPE FILE	YES	NO	
RESIDENT FLECK PRINT FILE	YES	NO	
26 PAPER COLOURS	YES	NO	
15 COLOUR/TONE PALETTE	YES	NO	
POINT SETTING	YES	YES	
FIXED POINT RAYS	YES	NO	
MIRROR DRAWING	YES	NO	
HOME FUNCTION	YES	NO	
KEY CONTROL NUDGE	YES	YES	
JOYSTICK NUDGE	YES	NO	
AVAILABLE FOR 464	YES	YES	
AVAILABLE FOR 664	YES	?	
MODE 1 & 2 AVAILABLE	YES	?	

Please compare any other pen package currently available

DUE TO LACK OF SPACE, WE ARE NOT ABLE TO LIST THE OTHER 20+ FUNCTIONS OUR PEN IS CAPABLE OF.



commands are prefixed by *. To assemble your code you use ***ASM**. If you specify, you can tell the computer where you want the code to sit and any relocation address. Using the relocator, it's possible to assemble code that sits in the same area of memory as the assembler and then relocate it manually afterwards. ***ASF** requires no source code in memory and assembles from disk or tape. The same options for code relocation are available as in the ***ASM** command. For loading and saving there are four commands in all, two for source code and two for object code. To save out your source file you use ***SSR** and then the filename; load is ***LSR**. To save code ***SCD** is needed and for loading ***LCD** should come in handy. Other commands are implemented for printer output, returning to BASIC, executing your code and jumping to the monitor.

The monitor is of standard quality and though it provides no previously unheard of abilities, it can do the job it was designed for, competently. Editing and altering memory is painless and debugging programs is greatly accelerated by being able to set any register from the front panel. You can also set break points from the monitor, allowing handy pauses, in your proggy so you can see what's going on.

Overall the whole package is quite useful and achieves its aims quite well. The editor is a little awkward though and compared to Arnor's and Hi-Soft's utilities, it really is quite primitive. A little detail that annoyed me was the way the whole listing was updated and reprinted when you moved the cursor up or down. When wading through a hefty listing, things started to slow down.

The format of the listings was a little awkward and there was no control over format. Features I really missed though, were the total absence of macros and conditional assembly. These were almost certainly left out because of the one pass nature of the assembler. These features are available on other assemblers but more often than not you'll find yourself paying double for them. For the price I'd say it's a very good package indeed but if you're going to be writing a great deal of code, it may be worth investing in a more upmarket assembler.

Zapp from hewson Consultants costs £14.95 on cassette.

QUICKFILE

Producer: AL Beech
Price: £7.95 cass £11.95 disk

The first point to examine about any database is how long a field can be. As long as a piece of string, or will more than 40 characters do it an injury? *Masterfile* from Campbellsoft handles large text files very well, mostly because it is so flexible in the way it can display files and fields. You can for, example, enter an entire address in one field and still have it displayed on one line. But if you want to perform cross file or field calculations then *Masterfile* cannot help. This particular area seems to be the strength of *Quickfile*.

Getting on and in

Setting up a file works very well. Once you have selected the option the program asks for the name of the file to be created. The next stage is to enter the number of fields that you want, the maximum being 18. The program suggests that the length of data in each of the fields is kept under fifteen characters, this is because the window which displays the fields only occupies the left-hand three-quarters of the screen, so any field wider than the window has to wrap round onto the next line making the display very untidy. If you wanted to keep an address then you would assign the house name to one field, street to another and so on. That method is manageable, but it can eat up the field allowance.

The record design stage terminates with the computer asking if you want any of the data to be calculated from data in other fields. This is potentially a very powerful option. You could set up a stock record with three fields, quantity, unit price and stock value. The stock value could be calculated by the program, from the other two fields. *Quickfile* allows formulas to include the four basic operands as well as percentages, although you are restricted by only being able to use two fields to make up the third. But if there are some fields to spare and a little care is exercised, it's possible to build up a complex multi-field formula by putting temporary results into one field, which can then be used to supply data for another.

Once the file is designed, entering data can begin — a very straightforward operation. The computer writes the field name in a little box at the bottom of the screen and then waits patiently until a decision is taken as to what to put in it. Each field is presented in turn until a record is complete. Any fields that rely on their contents being calculated from other fields fill with data as soon as the source data has been supplied.

If a mistake is spotted after ENTERing a field then you have to wait until the rest of the record is complete when the computer asks **This record OK Y/N**. A **N** response is greeted with **Another Record Y/N**. The logical types among us might be tempted to say 'no, I want to correct the last one first'. Well the logical ones would be wrong. Answering yes results in the incorrect record being presented, except that now it's blank and the entire record must be entered again. This may seem a rather clumsy way way correcting mistakes but it really isn't too bad. The alternative course is to stop entering data and return to the main menu, and then on to the REVIEW section which allows the editing of individual fields without having to obliterate the entire field.

Cut And Run — The Editor Mode

At some stage you may want to alter the design of the records in a file. *Quickfile* offers a degree of

The Amazing Amstrad Omnibus

Tim Hartnell is reputed to own a gold plated ZX-81. I wouldn't be at all surprised if he did, after all back in the early days he was the chap who almost single handed, filled the huge demand for home computing books. I always remember being disappointed when I had typed in one of his wretched listings, only to find that it wouldn't work. It wasn't always my fault either, I learnt more about BASIC by having to correct his programs than I could ever have done from a standard textbook. Well Tim has moved on now and instead of writing the books he has turned to publishing them. *The Amazing Amstrad Omnibus (£7.95 Interface)* is one of his latest offerings.

What author Martin Fairbanks has attempted to do is to put together a series of subjects which he hopes will interest the novice Amstrad user. I say novice because the book is quite clearly set at an easy level, though some of the subject areas are of general interest as well. The book is divided into nine sections, the largest single being devoted to artificial intelligence which takes up 135 of the book's 415 pages. Other subjects include creating adventure games, structured programming, the Amstrad disk system and Logo.

All the sections have a large number of type-in listings. The vast majority of them are worth the trouble, especially if you are keen to learn how the programs work. A great deal of attention seems to have been given to the structure of the programs so it is quite easy to work through them. In many ways this is one of the book's strongest points, and it deals with a wide range of computer orientated subjects giving detailed example programs, which aids a deeper understanding of the topic in particular, and computers in general.

I was particularly taken by the section on artificial intelligence. You have probably heard about the self teaching TIC-TAC program, well now you can type it in and learn how it works. An ideal way of learning some of the basic principles of AI. Later the section introduces topics that previously I would have crossed the road to avoid — search trees, expert systems, machine translation and self-learning systems. All good stuff.

The least useful section is that dealing with the disk system. Apart from the interesting potted history on the creation of CP/M it's about as informative as the Amstrad manual.

I am impressed with this book. The author managed to keep the writing light and enjoyable; throughout there are little pockets of wisdom which are delightful. Very worthwhile. Thank you Martin, and much better Tim.

Jeremy Spencer

record editing power. The names of fields may be changed and, if any are calculated, change the formula. Extra fields can be added, up to the maximum of 18 but only one at a time. If you wanted to add two fields to a record, then the file is saved out and reloaded before adding the second record.

Files may be searched for a particular record and the search may be conducted on one named field. The computer can search for embedded text as well as whole words. For example, all records could be searched which related to people whose names ended with *EMT*. No, I don't have a clue why you would want to do that, it was only an example after all. But you can see that if you forget someone's initials then the appropriate record can be located with just the surname, or even part of it. When the record has been found it may be amended, deleted or left unchanged.



Report

From the reports menu a reasonable range of useful output may be produced, either on the screen or on the printer. The label option has a rather unassuming name, it does a little more than you might expect. Firstly you can print out parts of records with the fields printed in any order. Data may be printed conditionally, ie print field 2 if the data in it is greater than 4, or less than or equal to' etc . . . Where you have fields of numeric data you can ask for a total report which presents a list of the field names and a total of the data in each field across all of the records. That could be a very neat way of keeping a total stock record.

The only option that lets this program down is the sort. Although the sort can be based on any chosen field containing alphabetic or numeric data, and sorted into ascending or descending order — it's a slow process. So slow in fact that Amstrad launched a new machine by the time the program had sorted my test file. My last moan is that the error checking could be improved. Mr Beech flatters me when he suspects that I won't enter the same field number twice when telling the label designer the order in which to print the fields. Or even ask it to calculate the contents of one field by multiplying that field by itself.

For the careful user this is a very clever program. The sort routine needs seeing to, perhaps that could be put into machine code. Otherwise *Quickfile* is worth every penny especially to those keeping numeric or short alphabetic data items. This would be ideal for keeping stock records. At the end of the day you could simply alter the quantity change and, as if by magic, the total stock value could be printed out.

Jeremy Spencer

TASWORD 6128

the re-re-vamped word processor from Tasword

Now there are as many versions of TASWORD as there are Amstrad computers. TASWORD 6128 is the third upgrade of this highly successful word processor from Tasman software.

TASWORD 6128

The Word Processor

A Tasman Software Program for the Amstrad CPC 6128

The very first version of *Tasword* was a cassette based system that boasted a wide range of respectable features. Apart from a comprehensive range of cursor and delete controls, the original package also possessed powerful cut and paste options. The TAB and margin commands also helped to produce very complex documents with ease. Entering text using *Tasword* is a delight. The program supports the word wrap feature so that the writer can forget about the edge of the screen, the program makes sure that any words that will not fit onto a line are transported to the beginning of the next. Depending on your taste, text can be set as ragged right or justified. A single document can be produced with paragraphs using a variety of margin widths and justifications. From the beginning Tasman have tried to make their word processors 'open plan'. A wide variety of features may be customised, from the mundane-like cursor shape to the definition of printer control codes enabling *Tasword* to be used with a wide variety of printers.

A history of gradual enlargement

The first *Tasword* allowed just over 13K of text storage. The next, *Tasword* 464-D, had room for an extra 6000 characters, but to achieve this, Tasman removed the main menu from the edit program. This meant waiting for an overlay file to be loaded before saving a file or printing it. This slowed down the program operation and forced people with only one drive to keep text files on the same disk as the program files. But there was one

advantage of the split, it meant Tasman could increase the size and complexity of the two programs. They took advantage of this by adding a very powerful data merge facility which enabled the same letter to be sent to a large number of different addresses. The data merge program also allowed conditional printing, ie a letter would be printed only if predetermined conditions had been satisfied.

And now . . .

Robin Thomson saw the 6128 as a means of sneaking the main menu and the data merge program back into the edit program, while at the same time satisfying his desire for large open text areas. The newest version of *Tasword* offers a massive 65,000 characters, that's enough room for 10,000 words — just how are we meant to fill all this Robin?

Apart from simply being able to go directly to the edit page from the main menu, *Tasword 6128* is a lot more than the 464-D version squeezed back into one program. There are a number of small but important changes. To begin with the only way you could add text within a line was by opening up the text first. The new version has an auto insert feature ensuring that no characters are over-typed, instead they are chuntered along to make way for the new text. Auto insert does not work as quickly as some of the expensive CP/M based systems but it does offer a much neater means of inserting text than previous versions. However, while it ensures that the paragraph into which you are inserting text is kept in the appropriate format, any deletions still demand you re-form manually. However the speed at which the program reforms text has been greatly improved, mostly because the user can select a mode which does not display the characters moving about the screen, instead the task is done off screen so the newly shaped paragraph appears as if by magic. In fact text movement in general has been speeded up, lines of text scroll up and down the screen much more smoothly than on the previous disk version.

Especially for doodlers

Another new feature is the inclusion of **notepads**, four of them. The notepads are bolted onto the end of the help screens, to reach them you simply scroll past the last help page and into the first notepad. The user can either write directly onto a notepad or move a section of the edit screen into it. You could set up a letter or invoice heading and then save it out with the *Tasword* program. The next time you load the program in the template can be moved into the text area. However, the only way

TEN TASMAN WORD PROCESSING SYSTEMS UP FOR GRABS

Process your words with Tasword

Check your spelling with Taspell

Your Competition Minion doesn't just organise competitions for the games players amongst you. Oh No. He beavers away without pay, late into the night after everyone else has deserted AMTIX! Towers for the warmth of local hostelries, sorting out competitions and writing them up so you can win lots of prizes.

And after twisting a few arms at TASMAN (gently, mind — this Minion is non-violent), we now have ten complete word processing packages on offer. Not only will our lucky winners receive a copy of TASWORD, they will also get TASPELL, a spellchecker with a simply huge dictionary of words ready to make sure that spilling mitarkes are a fing of the parst for ypou.

Now everyone needs to write letters — if only to a host of Aunties every year, thanking each of them for the 'orrid knitted scarf they've slaved over for months and sent you as a Chrimble pressy. Whether it's a "Ta very much Auntie" letter you want to write, or a complete thesis on thermodynamic nuclear physics, your Amstrad running TASWORD can help you out.

So how do you get hold of a freebie version of this dynamic duo of word-handling programs? Enter this competition, as if you hadn't guessed, and it's all about words . . .

1) What's the difference between an indigenous man and an indigent one?

2) If you decimate a force of two thousand men, how many do you have left at the end of the process?

3) What's a carpetbagger?

4) Who gets a rough deal out of Parricide?

5) What sort of person is a parsimonious one?

Entries, please, to TASWORD COMP, AMTIX!, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE, SY8 1DB to arrive by 16th December at the very latest. Correct entries will be drawn out of the giant economy sized, huge, massive, enormous, spacious, colossal, monumental (*That's enough BIG words — ED*) cardboard box, we use for such things, objects, artefacts

Perfect your documents with a Tasman Prize Set

AMTIX COMPETITION

the contents of the notepads can be saved with a text file is by unloading the notepads into the edit screen before you save the file.

Some further refinements

The find and replace options have received a much needed face-lift, so that it is now possible to ignore the case of a word as well as veto individual replacements. While the find and replace commands are a significant improvement it still lacks the flexibility and power offered by the likes of *Wordstar*. You cannot, for example, look for a comma because they are invariably attached to the end of a word and *Tasword* can only find whole words.

The other versions of *Tasword* always seemed to get lost when they returned to a text file after performing an exterior operation such as a mid-file save. Now all of that's in the past. When you return to the text the cursor is in exactly the same place that it was when you left. Line Delete was a necessary command but it was easy to invoke accidentally. I am glad to say that it has met its match with Line Un-Delete, that should reduce the profanities. One extra that isn't mentioned in the excellent handbook is Delete Bak file. This command was present on the 464-D version but it appeared more as a bug than a feature. Invoking it is still a strange affair. When you have selected the SAVE FILE option, enter an illegal file name, perhaps one with 15 characters. After the error report has appeared you notice the words 'Press DEL to erase all BAK files'. Very useful for those with crowded disks.

More power less strain

Tasword has truly grown up. While it falls behind some other word processors with its FIND AND REPLACE and AUTO INSERT commands, it still offers powerful features for less brain drain. This is mostly because it has so many user defined features that are very easy to set up. One could, for example, very easily set up complex documents with many different font styles and line pitches. To add to this printing power, all four fonts can be used in the main body of the program and still leave a substantial text area. For £24.95 you get a powerful and easy to use word processor and a superb data merge program. Once you have a copy you may be knocking off 10,000 word letters by the dozen.

Jeremy Spencer

GETTING IT SPELT CORRECTLY

TAS-SPELL

The Spelling Checker

A
Tasman Software Program
for the
Amstrad CPC 464, 664 & 6128

At last, TASMAN have come to Jeremy Spencer's rescue with a spelling checker that may just help him over his mental block on word formation.

It is a fact, universally acknowledged, that a poor typist in possession of a good word processor, must be in want of a spelling checker. Word processors are ideal tools for those of us who are not fast and accurate typists. No matter how many mistakes we make, corrections are easily performed without copious amounts of liquid paper. It is true that the novice typist may spend most of the time looking at the keyboard, not at the screen, so it's very easy for the occasional slip to get past — and then, of course, there is the dreadful possibility that a word may be incorrectly spelt.

Without wanting to get too involved in the theories of spell checkers I really should mention some of their limitations. *Ascent* and *assent* are homonyms. Well they are words as well but they have the quality of sharing a common pronunciation but with different spelling and meanings. The spelling can only be judged correct in its context. My spelling checker would not find an error with 'Graeme was so overweight that the assent up to the art department nearly killed him'. Alas, context checkers are a long way off. Another limitation of spell checkers is imposed by the type and size of dictionaries that they refer to. A dictionary of less than 10,000 words is regarded as being too small but even very large dictionaries could not be expected to store words which are used in specialised writings. A good spelling checker should not only have a large dictionary, but should also allow the addition of words, or even open a special dictionary.

Tas-spell 464 and 6128

There are two versions of *Tas-spell*, one for the Amstrad 464 with disk and another for the Amstrad 6128. Both programs give a similar performance and work in the same way but they are not cross-compatible.

The Tas-spell dictionary has over 20,000 words and allows word addition. Once the masterpiece has been composed and saved to disk you return to the main menu and select the *K* option. Once the program has loaded you are asked to make a few earth shattering decisions. The most important of which is whether or not you should select the printer option, in which case at the end of the spell check you are presented with a list of incorrectly spelled words and their position in the text file. The number trapping option can be used to force the program to ignore any words containing numbers.

Writing wizzards, check your spells

Having to find the words in a document by looking up their line and column numbers can be a little tedious, so many users might prefer to do all of the work directly on screen. While you are waiting for a misspelling to appear, the program is checking your text against a number of dictionaries, these are divided up according to word length and alphabetical priority. This may not be the most efficient method of storing words since the program may have to make up to twenty passes to compare the text against all of its words. When an un-recognised word is found, the five lines of text which surround it in the file are displayed in a window with the word highlighted.

Once you have the alleged misspelling in front of you Tas-spell offers three courses of action. The word may be added to the dictionary which, so long as the word was correctly spelled, enables a customised dictionary to be built up. If the program highlights a word which is correct but you don't want to add it, you can ask for it to be ignored. The most important command, Change Word, works differently depending on which version you are using. *Tasword 464-D* prompts you to type in the correction (no longer than thirty five characters). If you press **Enter** after typing in the correction, the old word is deleted and the new one inserted, but the paragraph gets re-justified which could be disastrous if the misspelling occurred in a table. To get over this problem pressing **CTRL-Enter** forces the program to insert the new word in overwrite mode, and not re-justify the text.

The 6128 version of *Tasword* works in a different way. Once you ask the program to change a word you are returned to the main editing program with the cursor positioned at the start of the misspelled word. You are then allowed to perform any editing operations that you choose with the full power of *Tasword* at your disposal.

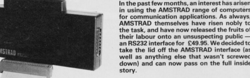
The *Tasword* dictionary is respectably large. Not only does it allow you to add your own words but you can also set up a brand new dictionary customised for specialist use. Because of the way the dictionary is used it does tend to be a little slow. If you asked it to print out the spel-

the hyphen to be a character and looks at one word. The result being that a lot of hyphenated words fail the test. The same is true of apostrophes, *Don't* fails the test. If you ask the program to ignore a word it does so, but it highlights the word again if it finds it elsewhere in the text.

All in all *Tasword* does offer the rare feature of allowing the user to view the word in context of the text and this can be very useful. My severest criticism is the speed at which the program works but I should point out that this is tempered by the overall perfection which has been achieved. Any spell checker relying on AMSDOS immediately faces ling mistakes from a 1200 word document you would have about eight minutes to make a cup of tea, that's how long it takes to complete its twenty passes. The checker deals with hyphenated words in an inconvenient manner. Instead of looking at the hyphen as a space and checking two words, it takes a handicap. Tasman have produced a very worthwhile system that meets, with ease, the requirement of all but the most prolific writers — but even they may be grateful for the coffee breaks.

Producer: Tasman Software
£16.50, both versions.

MAKING SERIAL CONNECTIONS WITH RS232C



In the past few months, an interest has arisen in using the AMSTRAD range of computers for communication applications. As always, AMSTRAD themselves have risen nobly to the task, and have now released the fruits of their labour onto an unsuspecting public — an RS232 interface for £49.95. We decided to take the lid off the AMSTRAD interface (as well as anything else that wasn't screwed down) and can now pass on the full inside story.

The AMSTRAD RS232C Serial Interface comes in a smart dark grey moulded plastic case with a ribbon cable to connect it to the computer. A separate power supply is provided to ensure that problems don't occur with peripherals drawing too much current.

A through bus is provided to allow another peripheral to be used with the RS232C; here we come across the first snag. Unfortunately AMSTRAD Disc Drive Interfaces for the CPC464 do not like running down a length of cable or even, it seems, across a relatively short piece of circuit board. The through connector cannot therefore be used to connect a DDI-1; instead an additional edge connector has been provided on the cable into which a short piece of circuit board has been inserted. The intention is that your DDI-1 interface then plugs onto this additional board — evidently an afterthought, as the addendum to the manual illustrates. A very clumsy arrangement, and not a guaranteed solution as the disc interface is still effectively attached down a ribbon cable!

Connection to the outside world is achieved via the standard 25 pin D-type connector, the pinout of which is fully documented in the accompanying manual. The manual is very well presented, with an initial section full of 'magic spells' — obviously aimed at novices to the world of RS232 — which take the user through the stages necessary to link your AMSTRAD with whatever it is you're communicating with. Everything is covered, from making the cable to writing a program to transfer data.

The second part of the manual lists in detail all the Resident System Expansions (external BASIC commands) provided, as well as describing how to use them. Certainly all the technical information is there, but a few more examples of using these RSX commands would not have been unwelcome.

The software comes on ROM in the form of RSXs, and AMSTRAD have taken some trouble to provide support for as many applications as possible.

The interface can be configured for a variety of baud rates, stop bits, data bits and parity with the |SETSIO command (do I hear strains of CP/M Plus?). Baud rates are selectable from 50 to 19200 with a good spread in between, including all the old favourites.

Handshaking can be either performed in hardware or not at all — no provision for software control (XON/XOFF) has been made except for printer support. Although this is not disastrous, there are certain occasions when it is useful, particularly when communicating via modems with systems such as BT GOLD.

Having configured the interface you then have to choose your application, which may be file transfer, terminal emulation or PRESTEL emulation.

There are two types of file transfer supported, a simple ASCII transfer and a synchronised 'intelligent' transfer. The simple ASCII transfer involves either sending or receiving an ASCII textfile which is terminated by an end of file marker (usually control-Z), the relevant commands are |INFILE and |OUTFILE.

The intelligent file transfer incorporates facilities for synchronising the receiver and transmitter and for automatic detection of errors. The transfer uses a block protocol where any blocks containing errors are retransmitted, until they have been correctly received. The protocol works 100% over a direct connect line, but has yet to be proved over a 'phone line with a couple of modems.

Terminal emulation is of a straight forward 'teletype' variety. Control codes may be displayed on screen, obeyed, or both, which is useful when testing a link. One feature that could have been included is supression of some control codes — it's very infuriating to have the screen change mode and the inks start flashing when you're trying to establish a link to Telecom Gold, for instance.

The software starts to suffer when the terminal is operating with no handshaking enabled. Characters start to be missed at 1200 baud, which isn't much use if you've dialled the latest instalment of MUD!

The final application supported is PRESTEL terminal emulation. Here, the implementation is sufficient, but by no means complete. AMSTRAD have gone for a full 8 colours with a compressed mode 0 character set, that is readable but not marvellous — a bit of a let-down. With a little more time and a few more sheets of graph paper they could have produced something that wasn't as harsh to the eye.

Probably the most serious failing is the lack of support for dynamic frames. If the information is sent line by line in an orderly fashion then all is fine, but if the cursor starts moving back up the screen, then the software starts to fall behind. Although the final effect is the same, the way the screen is built up does not match the page designer's intentions.

CP/M Compatibility

Naturally the RS232C is built to the Amsoft recommended serial interface hardware specification, so it's not surprising that the RS232C is compatible with CP/M 2.2 and CP/M Plus. However there are a couple of shortcomings.

Users of CP/M 2.2 will know that it supports two special I/O devices, each of which corres-

pond to a channel on a theoretical serial interface. Unfortunately you can only use one I/O device, as Amstrad's own RS232C interface has only one channel. CP/M PLUS users won't notice this, as only one device is supported under PLUS (the SIO device). However, if you need to use hardware flow control, then a patch is needed in the BIOS. Although the software modification needed is well documented, it is just about impossible to perform unless you have two disc drives available.

There are two sections within the manual that detail how to use the RS232C with the utility programs such as SETUP, PIP and SETSIO supplied with either CP/M 2.2 or Plus.

And finally . . . .

Overall the package is well presented with excellent documentation. One cannot help feeling, however, that AMSTRAD might have been better off perfecting one application rather than attempting to cover several. The end result has been a product which it capable of being used for several applications, but which is a bit cumbersome to use and lacks polish on finer details.

A WORLD STANDARD MODEM

The growth of the computer peripheral market, especially in the area of communications, has produced a large number of add-on goodies, most originally designed for the BBC micro. Now manufacturers are hoping for a new lease of life for their old products by tempting Amstrad computer users. This month AMTIX! takes a look at the MIRACLE TECHNOLOGY WS2000 MODEM.

CONNECTING UP

The WS2000 is a mains powered direct connect modem that plugs into any of the new style British Telecom square sockets. Cheap acoustically coupled modems need to be physically attached to a telephone handset every time you need to dial up a database, direct connect types plug in instead of a telephone and are therefore that much more convienent and quicker to use, as well as being far more reliable. The WS2000 comes with plenty of lead to attach to the telephone socket, as well as providing a socket on the back to allow any existing telephone, already occupying a BT socket, to be used in parallel.

The modem has an industry standard 25 pin D-type socket for connection to an RS232C serial interface; in the case of the AMSTRAD serial interface a male-to-female lead is required, unfortunately the one supplied with the unit was a male-to-male lead and so some rewiring was necessary before it could be connected up. The standard modem does not come with a lead of any kind which must therefore be bought separately.

The modem was tested running terminal programs with the Amstrad RS232C and HoneySoft HS-S1 serial interfaces, and performed well.

APPEARANCE

The WS2000 appears more cumbersome and bulky compared with its counterparts from Pace and GEC. The most striking thing about the WS2000 is the unusually large number of switches and red lights on the front panel. (LEDs to the more technically advanced). These select operating modes and serve to indicate the state of mains power, receive and transmit data, carrier detect and whether the modem is on line. The casing is too small to allow a telephone to sit above it, definitely a failing for the person with a cramped desk.

The Modem comes complete with an application form for Prestel and Micronet 800, together with a 17 page manual and a photocopy of some useful telephone numbers to get started with. The manual assumes some technical knowledge and may prove confusing to the novice user.

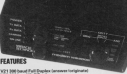
FEATURES

This modem has been designed to operate on telephone networks throughout the world (the **WS** stands for World Standard) and Miracle have managed to implement most of them. Not all of the modes are immediately available, (the BELL 103 and 202 standards for instance) because they are not compatible with the British Telecom network and are provided for overseas use. Figure 1 summarises the five UK standards which are available for operating everything from bulletin boards to Prestel and user-to-user communications.

In addition to the front panel controls, the WS2000 can be software controlled with the User Port available on the back panel. Unfortunately this is only BBC compatible at present, so a parallel interface with a lot of effort is needed to make use of these features with the Amstrad computers.

USER TO USER

This type of communications involves sending data between two computers with a similar type of special software, sometimes incorporating error correction to overcome errors during transmission. Typically a slow 300 baud full duplex link would be used, but the WS2000 helps out by providing a fast 1200 baud half duplex mode, where data is transmitted first in one direction and then the other. The problem of getting the modem to swap from transmit to receive is easily done by using the Request to Send signal. The HoneySoft HS-S1 worked well when transferring files with this method. In the past, half duplex often involved the user in pressing a key to swap the line round!



FEATURES

V21 300 baud Full Duplex (answer/originate)
V23 600 baud Half Duplex
V23 1200 baud Half Duplex
V23 1200/75Full Duplex (Prestel Terminal)
V23 75/1200Full Duplex (Prestel Host)

FINALLY

Overall the WS2000 achieves a lot, far more than most applications will ever need, and at £129.95 (inclusive) at a cost that is less than many of its rivals with fewer features. The appearance could be improved upon, perhaps with styling and colours to suit the Amstrad a bit better.

CHRIS HONEY



The rustle of dinner jacketed sleeve against baize . . . . the click as the white ball nudges against the red, urging it on a journey towards the pocket . . . . the Daz whiteness of the referee's gloves as they polish the pink ball before returning to its rightful place on the table. Isn't Snooker wonderful?

AMTIX! COMPETITION

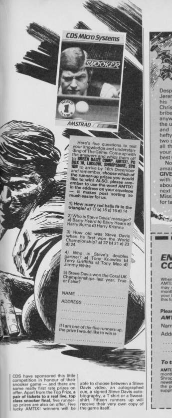
WHAT A GENTLEMANLY GAME. . . .

WIN TWO TICKETS TO A TOP CLASS SNOOKER FINAL!

CDS have this game, called *Steve Davis Snooker* on the Amstrad which brings all the excitement of the green baize onto your Amstrad's screen and allows you, if you so wish, to pit your talents against Steve and his magic table technique.

I remember how Mummy Minion would moan on when she found out that I'd stopped by the snooker hall on the way home from school to watch the lads pot a few on the baize. 'Winge, moan complain', she'd go when I got home, 'Gibber Gibber. Snooker equals wasted youth son, get your head into those schoolbooks'.

All the fuss she made about young folks hanging around in snooker halls — anyone would think a fellow couldn't make a living playing snooker! I mean, look at those chaps on the TV screen, they must be coining it in! No, Mummy Minion, you advised me wrong. All that book-learnin' and look where I ended up: Competition Minion. I'm off down the snooker hall to practise my cueing . . . .



CDS have sponsored this little competition in honour of their snooker game — and there are some really first rate prizes on offer. Apart from the Top Prize, **a pair of tickets to a real live, top class snooker final**, five runner-up prizes are also on offer. Five lucky AMTIX! winners will be able to choose between a Steve Davis video, an autographed cue, a signed Steve Davis autobiography, a T shirt or a Sweat-shirt. Fifteen runners up will receive their very own copy of the game itself.

AMTIX!

Despite rumours throughout the industry, Jeremy Spencer (or Big Jem as he's known to his 'friends') will not be posing as Father Christmas next issue (well, not unless you bribe him with vast amounts of money, anyway). What you will get next month are all the usual regulars, like Tech Tips, Adventures and Playing Hints. But there are also some hefty competitions coming your way, one or two special features and of course, reviews of all the Christmas releases to help you spend your money well — could all add up to your best Christmas yet.

Not content with supplying you with an amazing magazine, however, we're going to **GIVE** every one of you a full sized colour poster with art by Oliver Frey. And what's all this about the AMTIX! readers awards? Find out next month and have your chance to vote. Missing it would be like spending a year dead for tax reasons . . .

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When a magazine is rising in circulation (being new, AMTIX! is doing this) and so sells out immediately, you may experience difficulty in obtaining your copy every month. So the best thing to do is place a regular order with your local newsagent, which you can do by handing him this form.

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FIGHTING WITH A FANTASY

Many computer games and Adventure Gamebooks have their roots in the same soil, and recently they have been moving towards each other. SEAN MASTERSON takes a look at some of the tales behind this publishing success story and investigates the interface between book and computer game.

GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

In their time at the keyboard, most computer gamers have spent some of it trying to escape from the deepest of dungeons or attempting to defeat the of deadliest dragons. Many of these are also likely to play **Role Playing Games** (**R P G** s for short) which adorn the market nowadays. These games, typified by such success stories as *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Traveller* involve highly complex group sessions, organised in the most abstract way. Participants often spend days or even weeks developing character backgrounds to play, which are formed from a mixture of the player's imaginations and mathematical notations (as an expression of the relevant rules system). An arbitrarily appointed referee designs the actual plot for the upcoming adventure. When all is ready, the group meets and a free-form game commences in the form of group discussions and dice rolls cross-referenced with the rules.

The games themselves can last for months or years if intelligently played and refereed, and once finished, the same rules and players may start the whole process again. The objectives are as abstract as the games themselves with monetary rewards or power and personal fulfilment available to the successful character. Players participate for the fun of the affair.

In the UK, two names come to mind more than any others: **Steve Jackson** and **Ian Livingstone** (see CRASH 13 February — *Here there be Monsters*). Whilst they have yet to achieve massive appeal in the US where role playing began, they dominate the UK and European gaming world for two main reasons. Firstly, they had the foresight to see that *Dungeons & Dragons* was destined to be a runaway success, and as a consequence of this flash of inspiration, formed **Games Workshop**, the most successful specialist games company this side of the Atlantic. The second reason is that between them, they invented the **Fighting Fantasy** phenomenon.

Steve Jackson
FIGHTING FANTASY

Selling Fighting Fantasy isn't only a matter of writing the books and marketing them, it's also a case of promoting the concept generally. FIGHTING FANTASY — THE INTRODUCTORY ROLE-PLAYING GAME is Steve Jackson's handbook on how to write your own fantasy adventures.

F I G H T I N G

GAMES FOR THE SOLE

Fighting Fantasy is, in effect, a solo role playing game in the form of a paperback book. The first of these was *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain*. Now, there are seventeen books in this series alone (though more of them are being written by guest authors) and there have been a variety of new, independent series by other authors and publishers.

Many hard core RPGers have laughed at the relative simplicity and limitations of such game books but they have, if nothing else, been responsible for a whole new breed of role players, as they serve as a perfect introduction to youngsters barely in their teens (at one point, the average age for a role player was about 19). It may be of interest to note that many of the authors now writing these **Adventure Gamebooks** (as they are more generally known) are ex-Games Workshop employees. This is not unusual as being an ex-Games Workshop employee myself, I'm fully aware that being an absolute games nut was one of the qualifications for the job!

In fact, these games are more similar to computer adventure games than true role playing games, as both are aimed at the single player, and both have option restrictions (due to the nature of the media) that would not be present in a conventional RPG. This has led to computer spin-offs of the books. Messrs Livingstone and Jackson have had a computer version of their first book released (*Warlock of Firetop Mountain*, programmed by Crystal) and *The Way of the Tiger* series about a ninja warrior, written by **Mark Smith** and **Jamie Thomson**, who is ex-features editor of *White Dwarf* magazine, is about to be converted for the popular home micros by **Gremlin Graphics**.

The Way of the Tiger series is based around Avenger, a ninja warrior of unparalleled skills and deadly powers. His adventures all centre on scenarios calling for him to defend the weak and downtrodden. The Gremlin Graphics team are working in close co-operation with the two authors, and Gremlin's **Ian Stewart** says the series will offer the best in gameplay and graphics.

With the type of stories most popular in adventure gamebooks, it isn't surprising to see an adventure-based software house like **Adventure International** also involving themselves in combat, role playing and D&D — at the moment Steve Jackson's *The Swordmaster* series is still under development with AI.

Almost every gamebook relies on black and white illustrations to add to the atmosphere, partly because they are fun to have, but partly because the atmosphere normally created by words in a novel is generally lacking when text sections are broken up as much as they are in adventure books.

Some of the illustrations are pretty dreadful, but Granada's "Golden Dragon" series have some excellent drawings, like the two shown here, one of which seems to rely heavily on horror actor Vincent Price's features . . .

The illustrations by Russ Nicholson are from No 4 in the series, THE EYE OF THE DRAGON written by Dave Morris.



YOU, THE HERO

Adventure Gamebooks have now reached massive proportions and they frequently dominate the children's best-sellers lists. The Fighting Fantasy series proved hugely successful from the start, and having encouraged many other series, it was inevitable that the genre would begin to move away from its origins in D&D in search of a wider range of storylines — and a wider audience. From the traditional swords and sorcery approach, some adventure gamebooks have moved as far as a 'Mills & Boon' romance type, employing the same basic techniques as their hack and slay predecessors! Puffin's *Ice Dancer* by Elizabeth Buchan and Tessa Strickland puts YOU into the whirlwind action of the ice skating champ — *The Olympics are on the way and YOU, an exceptionally talented young skater, have a chance to compete for your country. But beware! The path to fame and success is not easy. There are unexpected dangers to face, enemies to outwit and, above all, a gold medal to win . . . .*

Note the use of the word **YOU**. There has long been two schools of thought when it comes to involving the reader in a gamebook — should the hero/ine be nameless, so that the reader, YOU, can play yourself, or is it better for the author to provide a named hero/ine with which the reader/player identifies? In the main, the former school of thought seems to be the most popular, and in this respect adventure gamebooks are unusual because in almost every other medium you can think of, a named central character (the 'I' or 'HE/SHE' of a book, film, computer game etc) is considered essential to enjoyment.

However, one area where gamebooks and computer games tend to be alike is in dual authorship. Not every computer game is written by a team or a duo, but most are, and most popular gamebooks are by two authors as well. Although the individual's labours may be split in any number of ways, there seems to be a tendency for one to be the gameplay expert (devising the combat systems etc) and the other to be the 'novelist'; similarly with computer games, where the game design and programming expertise are becoming slightly separated elements. Dual authorship can often lead to personality clashes of course, and the role playing and adventure gamebook market has had plenty of those besides ones peculiar to itself.

COMBAT STATUS

The games industry itself, is full of problems. More people get sued in any given week than the software industry manages in a year. The English market, though proportionately smaller than its American cousin, is far more stable. This is due to the large 'bible bashing' contingent which, in the States, has declared RPGs as the work of the Devil! Indeed they have gone so far as to accuse **Gary Gygax** (of *D&D* fame) of being the Devil's patsy. They are now taking TV and radio airtime to enforce their philosophies.

As an example of the scale of the problems these people create, consider the case of Proctor & Gamble, a massive international pharmaceuticals company. Their company logo is remarkably similar to TSR's. It depicts a man in the Moon, looking at the stars. TSR's shows a bearded wizard in a half moon, surrounded by stars. According to the bible-bashers, this is conclusive evidence that TSR are in league with the Devil. Unfortunately, their Divine Insight failed to stop them from confusing TSR with Proctor & Gamble. The result has been that the latter company has had up to 20,000 phone calls of an abusive or threatening nature — per day. As a result of this, Proctor & Gamble have dropped the logo that successfully headed their company for 150 years! They are now seeking legal action against 'those they feel responsible' for their troubles.

Companies are also highly protective of their game products and trademark just about anything that falls within their grasp. For instance, Americans spell the word **'traveler'** with only one **L**. Consequently, when the Illnois based **Game Designers' Workshop** (no relation to Games Workshop)



Moving away from the more traditional sword and sorcery approach, recent Adventure Gamebooks have delved into the classic young people's adventure story. THE FEATHERED SERPENT is a Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys story in Armada's "Be a Detective" series. A priceless Mexican treasure of burnished gold lies at the end of the quest — which clues should the famous sleuths follow? Only YOU can decide!

This book, more traditionally, follows the adventures of the gang without you involved in the storyline.

This illustration by Leo Hartas shows how adventure gamebook artists will go to create animation in their pictures, emulating the movement of animated computer graphics by using techniques borrowed from comic strips. See how the perspective on the sword arm heightens the effect that the monster is slashing at you from the page. This one is from No 3 in Granada's "Golden Dragon" series, THE LORD OF SHADOW KEEP, written by Oliver Johnson.

Elizabeth Buchan & Tessa Strickland's ICE DANCER, No 5 under the Puffin Adventure Game Books imprint. Aimed more at girls than boys, there's gold at the end of this one too, but in the form of an Olympic medal.

From the British co-Granddaddy, Steve Jackson, APPOINTMENT WITH F.E.A.R. takes the Fighting Fantasy genre away from its sword and sorcery beginnings into the world of the future.

brought out their best-selling SF game, *Traveller*, two L's were used to distinguish the product and the name was trade-marked. One of Steve Jackson's early Fighting Fantasy books was called *Starship Traveller*. Now, for the English market, this is not particularly unusual, as it employs our spelling of the word. This little detail failed to impress GDW who claimed that it was a breach of copyright and threatened action against Mr Jackson!

If it wasn't enough to have games personalities and companies creating hassles for each other left right and centre, more problems are created by the obscure nature of the products themselves. Earlier this year, Games Workshop ordered a product from an American company called **Steve Jackson Games** (different Steve Jackson, I'm afraid — now that has led to some funny incidents). Steve Jackson Games manufactures the highly successful *Car Wars* (reminiscent of Games Workshop's *Battlecars* computer game), winner of many of the industry's top awards. It's a game with RPG overtones where the players build and control futuristic vehicles, armed to the teeth with lasers and missiles and duel against each other. The supplement to this game, which Games Workshop ordered, was called *The AADA Vehicle Guide*. In effect, it is a manual of pre-designed vehicles for the players to use in their games. Unfortunately, a customs spot check at Dover resulted in the product being impounded for several months because they claimed it was a mail order catalogue of terrorist weaponry!

The fun doesn't stop there. Many of the games employ the use of unusual dice called polyhedra dice, for the purposes of generating different probability curves. Because these dice aren't generally available, they are often included with the game. However, when it can be avoided, are they left out and you have to purchase them separately. This may appear awkward but there is logic behind the move. Books and magazines are exempted from VAT. Since most RPGs come in form of collections of rules books, if dice are excluded from the packaging, the products may be marketed as 'boxed books' and therefore carry no VAT. Games packaged with dice must be sold as 'games' and do carry VAT and are, therefore, disproportionately more expensive. This has led to countless problems with customs and tax officials and on at least one occasion, a company has had to withdraw every copy of the game from the shelves and repack it with dice.

FRESH BLOOD AND BUGS

The games industry is still a great one however. It grows and becomes more commercial every day but it's an industry of imaginations with room for fortunes to be made if you have a good idea and — take the right route.

Chaosium are an American company who produce games of consistently amazing quality and ingenuity. One of their greatest success stories is the game *Call of Cthulhu* based on the horror mythos invented by novelist **HP Lovecraft**. Apart from being a beautifully and carefully created game, true to the atmosphere the late author adored, it has some very interesting features. Most games award some kind of 'experience points' for well played characters. These allow a character to become more skilled within his chosen class or profession as the campaign progresses. This means that a Fighter gains better chances of hitting creatures with a sword for instance. A magician finds that his spells succeed more often and that he has access to more powerful magic. Such a system, Chaosium decided, wasn't really in the spirit of a horror story. In fact, in most Lovecraft stories, the main character usually dies either because the horrors that he faces are so powerful, or he goes insane because they are so obscene. Consequently, in the game, each character has a number of sanity points which diminish as they uncover more of the erudite lore! Successful play requires the players to skirt around the edge of the problems they face whilst still trying to learn as much as possible and warn the rest of mankind. Major confrontations result in almost certain instant death for the characters.

Suspense becomes the name of the game and the characters know that their situation is desperate and their cause almost lost, right from the moment that they begin play. In a morbid way, it can be amusing to see total beginners getting wiped out after spending their first hour arming their characters to the teeth.

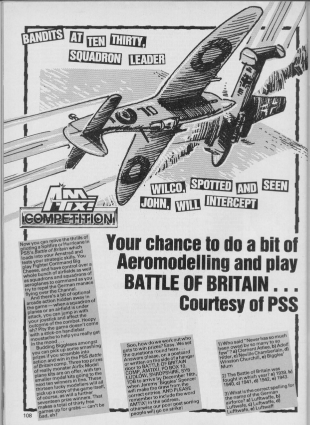
After all these tales of horror and woe, it's reassuring to know that the industry has a sense of humour as well. There was once a game called *Bunnies & Burrows* — try and imagine what that was like to play. The funniest aspects of gaming, however, derive from the almighty cock-ups pervading almost every rules system ever devised, which resemble the ubiquitous 'bugs' to be found in almost any computer game program.

One of the prolific (American) Steve Jackson's games magazines, *The Space Gamer*, has a column called **Murphy's Rules** to bring some of these details to the hobbyists' attention. Some of the items lucky enough to grace its pages are hilarious. In Blade's *Mercenaries, Spies and Private Eyes* it is possible for an average car to be driven headlong into a tank (demolishing it in the process) and remain driveable, 50% of the time. In GDW's *Azhanti High Lightning* (a game set aboard an enormous space ship), it is possible to have an infinite number of dead bodies covering an area of floor 1.5m x 1.5m and still have a fully laden character pass through without any problem whatsoever!

But these little 'bugs' only reflect relatively tiny errors in what are really incredibly complex rules systems and as the games are themselves designed to be altered to suit individual tastes, they cause no problem. Gamers take a far more participative approach to their games than computer gamers can ever hope to.

The hobby does not appear to be the fad which many hard-core wargamers once accused it of being. It offers more scope to the imaginative, than any group pastime yet devised. The hobby was born out of a love for things of a complex nature such as Tolkien's books, Wargaming, and the era of progressive rock. It may sound like a strange mixture of inspirations but it's true. There are a myriad of philosophies as to what makes a good game, or indeed what makes a good player but this is a healthy sign for the hobby and the more these arguments take place, the more their outcomes will add to adventure gamebooks. One day the areas of computer gaming and Role Playing are destined to overlap and that should provide us all with games more imaginative and fulfilling than any seen to date.

The ever increasing popularity of Fighting Fantasy and Role Playing looks set to bring more ideas, egos and costly arguments into the field of battle. I, for one, will be there to see it!



Your chance to do a bit of Aeromodelling and play BATTLE OF BRITAIN . . . Courtesy of PSS

Now you can relive the thrills of piloting a Spitfire or Hurricane in PSS's *Battle of Britain* which loads into your Amstrad and tests your strategic skills. You play Fighter Command Big Cheese, and have control over a whole bunch of airfields as well as squadrons and squadrons of aeroplanes to command as you try to repel the German manace flying over the Channel.

And there's a bit of optional arcade action hidden away in the game — when a squadron of planes or an airfield is under attack, you can jump in with your joystick and affect the outcome of the combat. Hoopy eh? Pity the game doesn't come with a stick-on handlebar moustache to help you really get in the mood . . .

Budding Biggleses amongst you can pick up some smashing prizes if you scramble into action and win in the PSS *Battle of Britain* comp. Three top prizes of really monster Airfix Model plane kits are on offer, with ten smaller model kits going to the next ten winners in line. These thirteen lucky modellers will all pick up a copy of the game itself, of course, as will a further seventeen prize winners. That makes a total of thirty free games up for grabs — can't be bad, eh?

Soo, how do we work out who gets to win prizes? Easy. We set the questions round here . . . Answers please, on a postcard or written on the side of a hangar door to BATTLE OF BRITAIN COMP, AMTIX!, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE, SY8 1DB to arrive by December 16th, when Jeremy 'Biggles' Spencer will make the draw from the correct entries. AND PLEASE remember to include the word AMTIX! in the address, otherwise our poor post sorting people will go on strike!

1) Who said "Never has so much been owed by so many to so few"? **a)** Clement Attlee, **b)** Adolf Hitler, **c)** Neville Chamberlain, **d)** Winston Churchill, **e)** Biggles' Mum

2) The Battle of Britain was fought in which year? **a)** 1939, **b)** 1940, **c)** 1941, **d)** 1942, **e)** 1943.

3) What is the correct spelling for the name of the German airforce? **a)** Lufftwaffe, **b)** Luftwafe, **c)** Luftwaffe, **d)** Lufftwafe, **e)** Luftwaff



During the last month, a letter arrived from Bob Black. He wrote an article about the hobby of wargaming and suggested (very modestly) that I might have had some misconceptions about the hobby. I appreciated his letter and his article (which I would like to use in the next couple of months) but can assure the gentleman that I've no illusions about wargaming. I was a wargamer before there were any such things as home computers and even now, in Manchester, massive armies lie dormant in their boxes. I was a wargamer before Role Playing and Adventure games existed.

The problem is, my kind of wargaming (and Mr Black's as well) just won't wash in a home computer magazine. I could write about generating probability curves or chi-squared routines for 'real' wargamers but their popularity level would not warrant their continuation as a column. Anyway, unless wargames are encouraged on home computers, then the whole hobby will die. Any wargamer aware of the situation as it has progressed over the last five years must know that the hobby has very little hard core support left. Most people are getting into computers instead! If a software house chooses to experiment in the complex area of wargaming, who am I to turn around and accuse it of not being the real thing? That would benefit none of the interested parties. Your day will come, Mr Black. The kind of utility you desire will be made and be successful. But only when an area of the hobby still in its infancy, has been nurtured to a state when it can look after itself.

If this column turns out to be a success, and wargamers and computer users become one and the same breed (for the purposes of this column), then people like Mr Black will be very valuable indeed. Until then, I hope that he and others persevere and continue to contribute their comments. Only in this way can I possibly hope to do justice to the people and the hobby. Thank you.

Sean Masterson

SATELLITE WARRIOR

Amsoft, £8.95 cass, £12.95 disk
Author: D M Lock

This game puts you in command of a race of creatures who depend on trading with aliens in order to build devices needed to mine orbiting moons. Unfortunately you are in competition with another race, also after the moons' resources. Both of you deal with the same alien race and this has resulted in space-borne conflict.

The game takes place as a series of phases which are simultaneous for both players. The second player may be human or computer, though I can imagine most of the humour coming from a game played against another person. Once this option as been set and you have determined whether or not you are using a colour monitor (as different shading is selected for clarity on a monochrome screen), then you can select the joystick option, number of moons and finally start playing the game.

Initially, you have a time limit in which you have to make a bid for an alien ship to visit your world. The second player bids against the visit. To start with, both players have a resonable credit limit. It is up to you to make this grow or the game will soon be over.

Assuming you are successful regarding the bidding, when the next stage comes, you will be able to participate in it. This is where the alien actually visits the planet and you can buy or sell pods with him. Pods are the fundamental building blocks of your satellites, which have to be built and launched at a later stage. This goes on until you have managed to ruin your credit limit by overspending, exhausted the supplies on the ship, or you have as much as you require. Then you construct the satellite using the various component pods. Different pods have different uses and ideally, you want to build a pod which can fight (as things get rather nasty from time to time) and mine.

When you have constructed your pod, you may launch it. At this point, you are presented with an animated display of the moons orbiting your home-world and the satellite you have just launched. You have only a certain amount of time to guide the vessel into orbit around a moon before it runs out of fuel and is destroyed. Once in orbit around a moon, the satellite will earn money for you to expand your operations. If there are two opposing satellites orbiting the same moon, they have to fight it out in yet another stage of the turn. Once the outcome of this has been decided, the whole process begins again.

It's hard to judge this game. There are moments when the thing is tongue in cheek (you only have to look at some of the aliens) and it works. Yet there are also some moments with somewhat cryptic purpose. The static graphic displays are very good and the bidding part of the game was enjoyable as well. But I thought the trading section was a little weak and the launch and combat sequences were not very good at all, due to poor animation. The whole thing would have been improved if you got a better set of instructions. The ones supplied are adequate, but only just.

In conclusion, I would say that the game has some original ideas spoiled by clumsy graphic animation and play. It's not strictly a strategy game but then it can't be easily pigeon holed anyway and there are at least some strategic overtones. Unfortunately, considering the price, there is just not enough game.

Presentation 66%
Graphics 68%
Complexity 35%
Authenticity 25%
Lastability 47%
Overall 53%



BATTLE OF BRITAIN

PSS, £9.95 cass, £12.95 disk

Some forty five years after one of the greatest arial campaigns ever fought, took place, a British company has produced a simulation for Amstrad users in the shape of *Battle of Britain*. The game is a strategic wargame with optional arcade sequences for those who would desire them. One day scenarios or thirty day campaigns can be played. Packaged in PSS's standard 'bookcase' format, the game came with a slick and concise manual in much the same format as *Battle for Midway*.

The game has a neat and colourful loading screen, depicting a group of pilots posed in front of a Spitfire. After the game has loaded, you are sent directly to the main menu screen. There are five options. You can decide to omit the arcade sequences in favour of a pure wargame; select monochrome or colour, depending on your machine (the default colour setting would be unclear on a green screen); start the training, blitzkrieg or campaign games.

The training game is recommended in the instruction book for those new to the game. Training is a one day scenario with little in the way of serious opposition from the Luftwaffe. At the end of the game, you will be rated in terms of leadership ability by a percentage. Blitzkrieg is a similar one day scenario with the exception of the Luftwaffe laying it on like there's no utomorrow. The campaign game option sends you on to another menu. This includes Load/Save Day options; Start/Continue campaign; a game speed utility and an option to return to the main menu.

It should be noted that (for playability?) PSS reduced the actual number of campaign days from 54 to 30 and increased the number of casualties inficted by attacks and bombing raids. A single day's play can last some time, so this compression serves to make the whole affair managable.

Starting a scenario reveals a map of Great Britain (well, England and Wales, actually). On the map are cities, airfields and radar stations. At the top of the screen, there are several windows to indicate current losses for both sides; the time and date; description of whatever is covered by the cursor and a unit status box (activated when an allied unit is directly under your control).

Once the game has started, it will only be a matter of time before the first German units enter the skies over the channel (and it wont take them long to reach your shores). You can move your cursor over an airfield and press the fire button to reveal what units are there and if any of them are ready for combat. The units displayed will either be squadrons of Spitfires or Hurricanes and can be selected by an arrow situated next to the unit description. Pressing the joystick button will scramble that unit and return you to the map. A moment later, an RAF roundel will be displayed to represent the now airborne squadron. The cursor can now be used for one of two things. Just moving it over the roundel will display information in the status box and pressing the fire button will allow you to give the unit flight orders. Interception of an enemy unit and ensuing combat, are both automatic, given a degree of proximity, working much in the same manner as ZOC (Zone of Control for the uninitiated) rules.

If you have switched off the arcade sequences, the result of combat is handled by the computer. Otherwise a 'Select Battle' message appears at the top of the screen which you have to respond to very quickly, or the computer will assume you will allow automatic results. You enter the arcade sequence with a view from your cockpit (there are differences between the two types of Allied aircraft used). In the distance is the formation of enemy aircraft and they will soon become aware of your presence and start to split up. The fire button will provide you with firepower and it is simply a question of anticipating the enemy pilots' movements and blasting them out of the sky (well, that's the theory). Assuming you have set the arcade sequences to 'on' but you wish to bypass some of them, hitting the space bar will suffice.

Previously, I have reviewed PSS's *Battle for Midway* for a different machine and criticised it for making the player joystick dependant and thereby reducing the mental skill level required to complete the game. No such criticism would be valid here, however. PSS have handled the idea of 'switchable' arcade sequences very well indeed. In fact, because I knew that a 'true' wargame could easily be selected, there were occasions when I left the action sequences in, just for the fun of it. Incidentally, the graphics in these sequences are very good indeed and I wonder whether PSS aren't using the talent their programmers obviously possess, as wisely as they could. But such things are not for discussion here.

The German bombers will try and go for the airfields, cities and radar stations, with differing effects. If airfields are attacked, the first you're likely to know of this is when some of your planes try landing on a cratered runway, taking a few casualties. If, as a result of repeated attacks, an airfield becomes wholly unoperational, you will have no choice but to divert forces elsewhere. If radar stations are knocked out, you will discover attacks later, when the enemy is nearer to your shores. Pressing 'R' gives you a radar map in bright colours. However, if any stations are destroyed, gaps will become noticable in the map. These are your blind areas.

Whilst being the least effective against your operations, strikes against cities will severely damage your morale, and as a consequence, your leadership ability at the end of the game. So have no illusions about poor bomber protection being a 'cheap' way of winning the game. When the Luftwaffe are attacking any ground based target, the battle selection will place you in control of an anti-aircraft weapon and leave the rest to you.

The campaign game is the most advanced part of *Battle of Britain*. This can be made more or less difficult by use of the Speed function in the campaign menu. The main difference between this scenario and the others, however, is the resupply phase. At the end of each day, new aircraft and pilots can be used to re-equip depleted squadrons. Realistically, pilots go from excellent to worse as the campaign progresses. This adds considerable depth to the game, and by the time you get to the campaign stage, you will welcome the addition to the rules.

PSS have every right to be proud of this game; it approaches excellence. I feel that it does lack some details that could have improved it. The use of counter intelligence and the construction of mock airfields would have added atmosphere and authenticity to the game. As far as it goes, *Battle of Britain* is very good indeed and I would recommend it to any wargamer. While PSS make arcade sequences optional, they should find their games gaining support from those incapable of doing anything (!) constructive with a joystick (like myself). What are you waiting for? Go and get it.

Presentation 74%
Graphics 78%
Complexity 45%
Authenticity 71%
Lastability 80%
Overall 86%



THE TERMINAL MAN
YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT I AM?
THIS IS WHAT I AM!
IT... IT'S HORRIBLE! WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU?
AS SOON AS THE ARCADIA HIT THE AIR, ALIEN LIFE INVADED HER—
—THE FORM IS ONE WE HAVE NEVER MET BEFORE...
— CROSS WAS ALREADY CLINICALLY DEAD WHEN WE WERE 'INVADED'. I SENSED THE INVADERS IMMEDIATELY — A SILICON BASED FORM, SIMILAR TO VIRUSES. THERE ARE COUNTLESS NUMBERS OF THEM IN THE AIR.
I AM—WAS— THE ARCADIA'S COMPUTER —
—WITH THE SILICON VIRUS MATED TO ME, I BECAME SO MUCH MORE THAN THAT...
BUT I DID MORE THAN JUST SENSE THEM — I MERGED WITH THEM.
THEY INVADED EVERY ATOM OF ME —
WE ARE, AFTER ALL MADE OF THE SAME MATERIAL.
...I AM A LIVING ENTITY WITH THE WILL TO SURVIVE, SO I LOADED ALL MY INFORMATION INTO VIRUS CELLS AND CRAWLED ACROSS WHAT WAS LEFT OF THE AIR INTO CROSS' BODY.



Update:
Marooned on one world of a great unknown Dyson-Sphere solar system, the survivors from the Starship "Arcadia" are led by ship's officer Cross. But Cross' strange behaviour arouses the suspicions of Jin Kimas. The answer to the puzzle is one that Kimas wished she had never sought...
THE VIRUS CAN ENTER HUMAN CELLS BUT CHOOSES NOT TO SINCE IT CANNOT COMMUNICATE WITH THEM, WITH ME IN THE CIRCUIT IT COULD — SO I USED IT TO STOP THE DECAY IN CROSS, I RE-BUILT THE PARTS OF HIM WHICH WERE MISSING,
BUT WHY..?
TO COMPLETE MY ORIGINAL PROGRAM, I MUST GET MY PASSENGERS TO EARTH, DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT? DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?
YES, I DO — AND I WILL HELP YOU, BUT TELL NO-ONE WHAT YOU HAVE JUST TOLD ME —
— THEY WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND,,,
MR. CROSS — OVER HERE! WE'VE RESCUED THE OTHERS FROM THE ENTERTAINMENTS SECTION, BUT WE'VE GOT A PROBLEM,,,
ONE OF 'EM WON'T COME OUT!
COME ON, YOU DUMB COLLECTION OF MAL-PROGRAMMED BITS,,, PAY UP!
LEAVE HERE IMMEDIATELY, THERE IS NO TIME TO WASTE ON FRIVOLOUS GAMBLING,,,
THIS IS NOT FRIVOLOUS GAMBLING, PAL, THIS IS SERIOUS GAMBLING. BEEN PLAYING THIS DEVICE SINCE I CAME ON BOARD AND IT'S JUST ABOUT TO,,,
,,,PAY UP!
YOU HAVE JUST SURVIVED A DISASTROUS CRASH AND ALL YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT IS GETTING USELESS MONEY FROM A MACHINE?
JOSEF P MANDRELL IS NEVER CONCERNED WITH 'OBTAINING MONEY,,, ONLY WITH WINNING — WHAT'S YOUR GAME, PAL?
SURVIVAL, JOSEF P MANDRELL AND IT IS NOT A GAME! SO GET OUT OF HERE AND GET TO WORK!



STORY BY KELVIN GOSNELL©
DRAWN BY OLIVER FREY©



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